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CHARLEY NUGENT;

or,

Passages in the Life of a Sub.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



London :

Saunders, Otley, and Co., Conduit Street.

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TO MY DEAR FATHER

**THIS WORK IS DEDICATED AS A SMALL
TOKEN OF LOVE AND GRATITUDE FOR THE
UNREMITTING KINDNESS I HAVE EVER RECEIVED
FROM HIM.**



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CHARLEY NUGENT.

CHAPTER I.

CHOOSING A PROFESSION.

"My dear, it is no use going on in this manner any longer; something must really be done about Charley."

"Good gracious! Mr. Nugent, that everlasting subject again; I am sure there is no occasion to be in such a desperate hurry, the boy is young enough."

"He will be seventeen very soon, my dear, and that is certainly old enough for him to make his choice of a profession. Eh, Charley, what think you?"

"Of course it is," I replied.

"Of course you think so," said my mother, reproachfully; "and of course we know what your choice will be—no need to ask."

"Well, mammy dear, I hope you don't object to it very much, because I do want to be a soldier."

"Now, Charley, you know well enough that I can't bear the idea of it. Just because you have a fancy to wear a red coat—for I am sure it is nothing else—you will go away and leave us all, and we shall

never see you again." Tears rose to my mother's eyes, and her voice trembled: I had always been her favourite child, and she had steadily set her face against all schemes for sending me from home for a lengthened period.

"My dear Emma, don't be absurd!" said my father, kindly. "Why should you not see him again if he entered the army? You don't suppose he would be on foreign service for the whole term of his natural life?"

"Of course not, mother dear," said I, rising to administer consolation in the form of sundry kisses. "Why, I might be quartered quite near home, and be able to see you constantly; and any way, I should get leave now and then wherever I was."

"Oh, Charley, I am sure you are happy here; you have everything you require and wish; why can't you be contented where you are?"

"But, mother darling, I can't stay here always, and I must choose some profession; and there is nothing I should like to be so much as a soldier."

"That is because you know nothing about it, and fancy it an idle life with nothing to do but enjoy yourself. It's all very well in this country, but you may be sent to India and die of jungle fever, or be torn in pieces by tigers; and then, if you go to the West Indies, there's the yellow fever and the mosquitoes;" and once more my mother's laced pocket handkerchief was applied to her eyes.

"A nice combination of evils, my dear Emma, and no escape from any of them," replied my father cheerfully; "besides, you forget snakes and wild elephants, to say nothing of sharks, and, possibly, the great sea serpent."

"There, now, Mr. Nugent, that is always the way, you just laugh at me when I say anything."

"Far from it, my dear, I have the greatest respect for your judgment; but every profession has its evils." My father looked grave as he said this, and was evidently thinking of Jack's formidable array of bills from Oxford.

"Why can't you be a clergyman, Charley?" asked my mother, "and then you could get the living of Dutton, and be near us."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed my brother Tom, an impudent monkey of fourteen, who had not yet joined in the conversation. "Fancy Charley a parson, with a long black coat and straight hair! By Jove! shouldn't I just like to see him. Rayther! No, indeed, it's not the cut of his jib, as the sailors say."

"Be quiet, Tom," said my mother, sharply, "what a rude boy you are, interrupting one in that way. And all that horrid language you bring out, where on earth do you pick it up?"

"Why, of course it's the language in general use among men of the world," replied Master Tom, undauntedly; the unblushing coolness of which asseveration, combined with the look of horrified amazement it drew forth from my mother and sisters, produced a burst of laughter from Tom and myself, in which my father could not help joining, and in the midst of which we all rose and quitted the breakfast table.

"Charley, come into the library," said my father, as I was leaving the room, and thither I accordingly went.

"Now, sit down there, Charley," said my father, as he placed himself in his own particular easy chair,

and motioned me to one nearly opposite him; "sit down there, and listen to what I am going to say to you."

I obeyed him, and assumed a look of profound attention.

"As I said to your mother, Charley, you will soon be seventeen, an age at which a young man should certainly be able to form some sort of notion of the profession he wishes to adopt."

"Certainly, sir," I replied.

"Now, you are no fool, my boy; your abilities are of a very fair order, and several roads in life are therefore open to you. Your choice should be guided by any strong bias you may feel, but it should, at the same time, be subject to mature consideration, for the choice of a profession is no trifling matter. Young men to whom the world is just opening see only the fair side of things in general, but all questions have two sides, and both of them should be studied. Now, in my own experience, I have known much evil to arise from fathers inconsiderately yielding to the strongly expressed wishes of their sons in their selection of a path in life; but I have also seen that it is injudicious in the extreme to thwart a strongly developed inclination, unless there are very important objections to it. Every argument in favour of or against the case should be fairly discussed, and many can only be pointed out by those to whom worldly experience has been the necessary monitor. After all this has been honestly and conscientiously performed, a young man of sense may be permitted to make his selection, for he is then doing so with his eyes open, understanding all the merits and demerits of the case. You acknowledge the truth of all this, Charley?"

"I do, indeed, my dear father," I replied, seriously, for this long speech had sobered me not a little, and my father spoke in a tone of grave interest that showed me the importance he attached to the subject.

"Well, Charley, I shall do this by you, and then I hope you will choose wisely and well."

I honestly confess that I had small belief in the power of the arguments that would alter my conviction of a soldier's life being the one of all others the most to be desired; but I prepared to listen with due attention to my father's approaching harangue, and settled myself more comfortably in my chair to await its commencement.

My father pulled out his spectacles, and carefully adjusted them on his nose, after which he made a search in various pockets, and ended by producing a letter.

"Look here, Charley, this letter came to-day, and is from your uncle Richard."

I may as well mention that this was my mother's eldest brother, a wealthy London merchant, from whom we had expectations.

"Oh!" was my reply, "what is he writing about?"

"About you," said my father.

"Very kind of him," said I, pertly. "He has never bothered himself much about me before, and I dare say it is about nothing very particular now."

"Then you are mistaken, Charley," replied my father, "for this is something very particular."

"I suppose he wants me to turn merchant too," said I, in rather sulky tones.

"He writes to say that if you have any inclination towards his profession he will place a stool in his office at your disposal, and there you will acquire its

first rudiments ; and though he does not actually say that you will eventually be promoted to a higher position, still I have little doubt that such will be the case, if he had reason to be satisfied with you."

"Oh ! father, I should hate being a merchant," was my hasty reply ; "I could not bear to be boxed up in an office in the City ; do write and decline his offer."

"Stop a minute, Charley, let us weigh the case well. I said I should point out to you arguments in favour of and against several professions. No need to speak of professions generally, for there are many that have nothing to do with your particular case. I shall limit myself to the three more especially under discussion, the Church, the army, and the profession of a merchant. Your mother would prefer your being a clergyman."

"But father," said I, interrupting him, "I never could be a parson ; I have no turn that way."

"That is the only objection I can produce in this case," replied my father ; "but it is a very important one. No man should enter the Church without a decided feeling that his heart goes with his choice, and that the duties of his calling are embraced by him with a full conviction of their responsibility. To make a convenience of a family living is, in my eyes, perfect sacrilege, and that such is often and often the case is very much to be lamented. Of course, had you been disposed to study for the Church, it would, as your mother remarked, have been in my power to provide for you, as Dutton is in my gift, and the incumbent a very old man. You would then have had an income of eight hundred a year, your residence would be in a neighbourhood where you are well

known, and where the society is good and pleasant, and, as far as mere human calculation can go, your life would be a prosperous one." My father paused, and looked at me for a reply.

"I hear all you say, my dear father," was my answer. "There is no doubt it would be very comfortable and all that sort of thing, but I have no inclination for the life and duties of a clergyman."

"Very well, Charley, no more need be said on that point. Now listen to the advantages you would derive from becoming a merchant."

A gesture of distaste from me, met by a reproving shake of the head from my father.

"Be serious, my dear boy, for a few minutes, and listen. Should you be inclined to accept your uncle's offer, I have little hesitation in saying that your fortune is as good as made."

I raise my eyebrows.

"Yes, in this way. Your uncle Richard is a wealthy bachelor. No one has any decided claim on his property, which will in all probability be divided among various relations. He has no son to succeed him in his business, and this proposal to take you into his office may end in your finally assuming an important position there, and becoming a member of the firm. It is a very rich one, and long-established; you would most likely be a wealthy man, Charley."

"Perhaps so, father, when I am as old and musty as uncle Richard himself, and should not care a bit for it."

"You think so now, my boy, but you will think differently by and by."

"Oh! no father. I could never be a merchant; so now let us hear what you have got to say about

the army. Want of inclination won't be the hindrance there, I can tell you."

My father smiled and said kindly, "Ah! Charley, you know little about it. I don't exactly say with your mother that the red coat has done it all, but I fear I must allow that the glitter and *prestige* of a military life have much to answer for."

"Well, my dear father, I don't exactly deny that there are certain parts of the life that please me more than others. I like the idea of going about and seeing new places and people, and I should feel proud when I reflected that the honour and glory of England are committed to the charge of her soldiers and sailors. I have no wish to be an idle, inactive soldier, to dangle about garrison towns, and smoke cigars up and down the streets; no! father; I should like to see service, and should rejoice in being ordered on a campaign."

"Ah! my dear boy, you are still looking on the sunny side. You imagine all will be easy and smooth; you make sure of a good allowance from me; purchase-money forthcoming whenever it is required, and any debts you may incur at once defrayed, without much trouble on your part."

"Well," said I, "I suppose you will give me an allowance of some kind or other, and, of course, I must just cut my coat according to my cloth; I am not extravagant, father."

"No, Charley," said my father, "I have not yet found you so; I wish I could say as much for all my sons." Jack's bills again. "But you have hitherto had but little temptation to be so; in the army it is quite another matter. There you will wish to do as your brother officers do, without ever considering the

difference there may be between your respective fortunes. It will mortify you if you must decline to join in plans and amusements set agoing in your regiment, and if you do it, you will involve yourself in difficulties."

"But, father, you speak as if I should be very poor."

"That is what I must fully explain, Charley. I am by no means a rich man, though we live in a very comfortable style. Your brothers and sisters have all to be provided for as well as yourself. Jack will have the property at my death, but it will be burdened with a provision for your mother, and the rest. I have not been able to lay by much; perhaps we might have lived in a less expensive manner, but we have never exceeded our income, and the Nugents are an old family, and have a position to support. I say all this that you may believe me when I tell you that my means are no more than sufficient for our requirements. Should you determine on entering the army, I will purchase a commission for you, start you thoroughly as a gentleman, and money shall be forthcoming for any promotion that may occur, this last to be deducted from the sum you will be entitled to at my death. During my lifetime I shall allow you three hundred a year, a sum amply sufficient for all necessary expenses and for many luxuries, but it will not allow you to be extravagant."

"I have no wish to be so, my dear father," I replied; "and I think three hundred a year is a very handsome allowance indeed."

"Many, certainly, have far less," said my father, "and make a most gentlemanly and creditable appearance upon very limited means; but many have a very

great deal more, and it is from associating with such men that danger is to be apprehended. The sum I have named I can afford, and you shall have it ; but in such a case I must have no bills left unpaid, and clamorous creditors applying to me for payment ; you must keep clear of debt, and this is not so easy as you fancy it. It requires good principles, which, I trust, you possess ; an amount of moral firmness not often found among young men ; and a steady determination to suit your expenditure to your means of payment."

" Father, I cannot promise all this ; but I will try."

" That is right, my boy ; but before we arrive at any decided resolutions, think the whole matter well over calmly and dispassionately, and then tell me your determination. Remember that, as a soldier, you will be, comparatively speaking, a poor man all your days. Your promotion may be slow ; you may be long abroad, and in most undesirable localities ; you will inevitably be almost a stranger to your home and family ; your health, and even your life may be sacrificed. Every life has its drawbacks certainly ; as a clergyman you would be very much chained to one spot, and many pleasures and self-gratifications must be renounced at the call of duty ; as a merchant, many weary hours must be passed toiling at your desk, and much anxiety would often be your lot, while it might happen that through unavoidable accidents the labour of years might in a moment be swept away. As a soldier you are exempted from those particular evils, and there are charms in a military life that as long as you are young may cause you to regard its disadvantages lightly. Now, Charley, to the best of my ability, I have laid your path in life

before you, and I only ask you to consider it well. Whatever your choice may be, I shall be satisfied; and I can only hope you will choose for the best."

My father paused and looked at me kindly, while I thanked him warmly for all the trouble and consideration he had bestowed upon me; and then, leaving the library, I proceeded to a favourite solitary walk of mine, and had a regular good think. I weighed all the pros and cons of the case; I summoned up in mental review the pretty rose-covered parsonage at Dutton, with its wide-spreading elms, and the capital fishing-stream where I had often caught such splendid trout; I tried to fancy myself in the place of worthy old Mr. Barker the incumbent, marrying and burying my parishioners, and giving them orthodox discourses from the quaint oak pulpit. No, it would not do, I had no vocation that way; as Tom had said, it was not the cut of my jib.

My prospect as a merchant, always barring the horrid slavery at the desk, was decidedly more inviting. I should probably be rich, and I knew that a golden key opens the door to many enjoyments. I should also be a man of importance, for I knew that my uncle Richard was worshipped, and looked up to for his wealth, and that he was a leading man in many great enterprises, and could command a vast amount of influence in many ways. But if my head argued in favour of this scheme, my heart most firmly opposed it. Bright visions rose before me of the sunny skies and blue waves of the Mediterranean; dark-eyed Spanish girls with mantillas, fans, and angelic feet flitted before my ardent fancy; then came the waving of ensigns, the thunder of cannon, the tumult and excitement of an engagement with the enemy.

“Hurrah!” was my vehement exclamation, which caused the instantaneous departure of a couple of fine pheasants just over-head. “Hurrah! there’s no life like a soldier’s, and a soldier I shall be, *coûte qui coûte*!”

CHAPTER II.

LADY LYLE.

HAVING communicated to my father the conclusion at which I had arrived, I received his consent to my choosing the army as a profession; and my mother was gradually won round to a faint approval of it by the sensible arguments of my father, and my own eagerness on the subject.

Now that the matter was finally decided, my father wasted no more time in uncertainty, but immediately set to work about the necessary preparations for my start in life. My name was forwarded to the War Office as a candidate for a commission, and my father also wrote to an influential nobleman in our neighbourhood, whose son represented the county, and requested him to use his best endeavours to procure me an appointment earlier than if I merely awaited my turn. He received a very polite reply from the nobleman in question, assuring him that he would do all in his power on my behalf, and that he had placed my name in his list to be attended to as soon as possible. I was then despatched forthwith to a cramming establishment for young gentlemen, where I studied a particular routine of information of various sorts; the greater part of which I decided at the time could

never be of the slightest use in any station of life to which it might please Providence to call me, nor have I had any reason in after experience to alter the opinion then formed. All this occupied some little time. I was very anxious to get on, so I studied hard, gave great satisfaction to Messrs. Cram and Stuff, and was pronounced ready for examination at an earlier period than usual. I accordingly underwent the ordeal without loss of time, answered a number of questions of no earthly use whatever, and which I can pledge my word none of the examiners could have replied to themselves, only the desired information was imparted to them on slips of paper in case of accident.

I had now passed, and was ready for a commission whenever it should make its appearance; but of that desirable event there was not the faintest token.

My father wrote again to Lord A——, and had another very civil reply, stating that his wishes should be attended to at the earliest opportunity, that the number of applicants for commissions in the army was unusually large, that there were many influential men waiting impatiently like himself for appointments for their sons, but that he would do all in his power, &c.

Two or three months passed in this manner, and my eighteenth birthday was fast approaching.

I was very much disappointed at this prolonged waiting, for though very happy at home, I pined to begin my career in life, and felt in an undecided, unsettled frame of mind that prevented me from employing my time in any very rational manner. I was very expert at all manly exercises, had a capital seat on horseback, and I flattered myself a very good

knowledge of a horse, swam well, and could handle an oar with considerable dexterity.

My eldest sister had taken pity on my idleness ; and besides greatly improving my knowledge of French, in which language she was a thorough proficient, she had undertaken my musical education, and I could play a few airs pretty decently on the piano, and twang a little on the guitar as an accompaniment to what I chose to consider rather a good voice. All this may sound egotistical, but it is difficult to write about oneself without seeming to be so ; and in this case I am forced to be my own trumpeter, that individual being apparently out of the way at present.

But here let me pause for a moment, to tender my thanks to that sister who thus charitably assisted me to beguile my period of probation. What she and I then considered merely a harmless method of passing a few idle hours, proved to me in after life the source of much pleasure and comfort ; and with a slight knowledge of drawing which I also possessed, kept me on many occasions from feeling the *ennui* that attacked the most of my brother officers when quartered in dull country towns, or sent on detached service, where their society was chiefly limited to their own.

For how much longer this state of matters might have lasted I cannot pretend to say ; but my patience was at a very low ebb, when an event occurred that proved the first stepping-stone to my future advancement in life.

I was walking on the high road one afternoon, a considerable distance from home, when my attention was roused by the clattering of horses' feet proceeding very rapidly, and the noisy roll of wheels fast approaching.

Turning round to reconnoitre, I saw a pony carriage, in which a lady was seated ; and the first glance told me that the fair charioteer had lost the command of the animals, who were tearing madly along at a pace frightful to behold.

Not a moment was to be lost ; the carriage was almost at hand, and just beyond the spot where I was standing, a very bad turn of the road occurred, with steep banks overhanging a stream. In a moment I sprung into the middle of the road, seized the bridles of the excited ponies, and violently dashed up their heads. They reared instantly, then kicked and plunged for a few moments, and finally stood quite still, covered with foam, and trembling very much.

I patted them, and soothed them with my voice, and then for the first time I looked at the lady, and perceived that she was young and handsome, but quite white with terror, and so agitated, that at first she could scarcely speak.

Taking the reins in my hand, I went up to her and assured her that all danger was over now, and hoped that she had not suffered in any way beyond the fright.

"Oh, thank you very much—no, I am not hurt—only so shaken with this dreadful run—I am so very much obliged to you," said the lady, raising a pair of splendid dark eyes to my face; "if you had not chanced to be here, I cannot say what might have happened;" and she shuddered as she looked at the sharp turn and the rugged banks, only a few yards distant.

"I am only too happy to have been of any assistance," said I, politely raising my cap; "but you cannot think of proceeding alone, with your ponies

hardly yet composed; I hope I may see you to a place of safety, or till you meet your friends or servants."

"But I cannot think of troubling you in this manner," said the lady eagerly, "only I am a little alarmed still—but my servant will surely be up immediately;" and she looked along the road she had just come.

"Pray do not mention trouble," I replied, "it is a great pleasure; and if you will allow me to drive you back, at any rate till we meet your servant, I shall then have the satisfaction of knowing that you are in safety."

She consented to this arrangement, and I accordingly got up beside her and drove the now quiet ponies who went along in the most docile manner.

The accident was caused by a fright they received while waiting at a gate, the servant having been sent in with a note. A covey of partridges took to wing noisily and suddenly almost close to them, and the ponies started off in a frantic manner, and defied every effort of their fair mistress to control them.

"I am Lady Lyle, of Egerton," said the lady as she finished her account of the accident. "May I ask to whom I am so deeply indebted? My husband, Sir Frederick, will take an early opportunity of thanking you for the great service you have rendered me."

"My name is Charles Nugent," I replied.

"A son of Mr. Nugent, of Langley Park?" said my fair companion, inquiringly.

"The same," I replied. "But let me assure your ladyship that no thanks are necessary, I consider myself most fortunate in having been of the slightest use."

"Quite proper that you should say so, Mr. Nugent," was her laughing answer, "but, at the same time, I am the best judge as to the amount of gratitude I owe you."

We became quite chatty and friendly as we drove along, and I was very sorry when I observed a servant in livery coming up the road in an extremely heated and overrun condition.

"There is my servant," said Lady Lyle, "and now I can release you, Mr. Nugent, with one more assurance of my thankfulness; we shall meet again ere long, I hope."

"I hope so, too," replied I earnestly; and as I quitted the carriage, and turned round to take the delicately gloved little hand that Lady Lyle extended to me, I could not help being struck with her beauty, now that she had recovered her colour, and was no longer under the influence of terror. Her large and lustrous dark eyes I had already observed, she had very black hair braided simply off her face, and her complexion, which was that of a brunette, could only be compared, from its glowing richness, to the sunny side of a peach.

She had a smiling and most taking expression, and a sweet ringing voice; her age might be about twenty-eight or thirty, and altogether she was just the sort of woman from whom it was uncommonly pleasant to be receiving protestations of gratitude for having saved her from what might certainly have been a very ugly accident.

In a day or two I had the gratification of reading a version of the whole proceeding in our county newspaper, in which the incident was described in the most inflated language; and the simple achievement of

stopping a pair of runaway ponies was treated as though one had engaged in single combat a whole menagerie of wild beasts ; "agonizing situation," "infuriated animals," being the mildest terms employed.

But the very following day as I was having a game at billiards with my sister Annie, a man in livery rode up to the hall-door, and a note was given to me, which on inspection proved to be from Sir Frederick Lyle.

He began by thanking me in the warmest manner for the service I had done his wife ; and begging me to excuse the ceremony of a visit from him as his house was full of guests ; he requested, in Lady Lyle's name and his own, that I would go over to Egerton and remain some days with them.

This struck me as being rather an agreeable variety in my present routine of existence, so I discarded my cue and betook myself to the library for the purpose of writing an acceptance of this very pleasant proposal.

The next day was named for my arrival if convenient to myself, and as my engagements were by no means of so important a nature as to prevent me from going at that time, I sent a reply in the affirmative, and instantly rushed upstairs to inspect my wardrobe, and discover whether I possessed vests and ties of sufficient taste to enable me to feel in a comfortable frame of mind on my appearance at Egerton. The search proved of a satisfactory nature, so I breathed more easily, and looked forward with considerable pleasure to the forthcoming visit, and to a renewal of my intercourse with the fair mistress of the mansion.

A spanking mare and well-built dog-cart took me over to Egerton next day an hour or two before dinner.

It was a fine park-like place, richly wooded, with a small lake in the centre of the grounds; the house itself in the old Elizabethan style, with many pointed gables and narrow diamond paned windows. But what a house for comfort as I had afterwards good right to know, for many a hospitable invitation has brought me within its sheltering walls, and the warm welcome that awaited me on my first entrance was never abated on any future occasion, but grew in sincerity and kindness till Egerton assumed in my heart the place of a second home.

Several gentlemen were playing at pool in the large hall, and the clicking of the billiard balls was the first sound that greeted my ears as I threw the reins to the groom and entered the house.

An elderly man of a very dignified and benevolent appearance left the players when he saw me, and held out both hands, exclaiming warmly,

“ You are most welcome to Egerton, Mr. Nugent, most welcome. I shall not easily forget the service you have rendered me; had any accident befallen Lady Lyle it would have been a sad day for us all,” and the tears glistened in his eyes as he shook me cordially by the hand. He entered into conversation with me for a few minutes, named me to the gentlemen who had ceased playing till his return, and then nodding his head to them, he said, “ Excuse me for a moment, I must take Mr. Nugent to my wife, and will then rejoin you.”

I followed him along a passage of considerable length which opened from the hall, and on his knocking at a door near the end the cheerful voice of Lady Lyle was heard, saying, “ Come in.”

“ This is my wife’s sanctum,” said Sir Frederick

as we entered, "and at this hour is strictly sacred to tea and scandal." Several ladies, mostly young ones, were seated about the room in lounging attitudes, their riding habits or garden bonnets showing what their recent occupation had been. All had cups of tea in their hands, and we had evidently interrupted a very merry discussion, so perhaps the worthy baronet's allegation was a true one.

Lady Lyle sat in a low chair by the open window, sipping her tea and pushing about with her tiny foot a little King Charles spaniel, which jumped up and barked loudly on our entrance.

"Down, Psyche! Be quiet!" said her ladyship reprovingly, as she rose and received me in the most cordial manner. "Pysche will know you better by and by, Mr. Nugent."

How pretty she looked in a simple white robe with a blue shawl hanging loosely from her shoulders, and her large garden hat untied and only half on her head. Such a winning smile and frank natural manner, no wonder her husband was wrapped up in her!

"Now, Mr. Nugent, will you be guilty of the feminine weakness of indulging in a cup of tea? We will admit you into the hallowed precincts of my boudoir as the greatest possible mark of our favour."

"I will take a cup with pleasure," was my reply, "and I hope that the other thing Sir Frederick mentioned may not be interrupted on my account."

A general laugh was the only answer, while Lady Lyle held up her finger with an air of saucy reproof, and Sir Frederick said, "Now, I see you will do very well, Mr. Nugent, so I will return to finish my game." The gracious reader will have perceived by this time

that shyness and *mauvaise honte* were not the dominant features of my character.

I must say that I was not much in the habit of feeling what is called "put out," and to the society of ladies I was remarkably partial. My sisters were lively, pleasant girls, perhaps a little too much addicted to that quizzing style of conversation, familiarly called "chaff;" but as in them it never degenerated into anything unladylike, it was rather amusing than otherwise, and had a decided effect in sharpening my faculties and enabling me to hold my own in a similar vein of controversy. Nearly an hour passed in a series of lively discussions on all and sundry, and much sharp *badinage* I had to encounter from the bevy of fair dames met in Lady Lyle's boudoir.

However, I flattered myself that I held my own, and gave as good as I got; and when we adjourned to dress for dinner, my reflections, as I followed the servant to my room, were to the end that Egerton was an uncommonly jolly house to stay at, and that I expected I should have rather an agreeable visit.

I found this most truly the case. Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle were models of a host and hostess, kind and attentive to their numerous guests, and yet allowing them completely to follow their own devices if they chose. They kept an excellent table, and the whole household was maintained in the most comfortable style; handsome without ostentation, and anything like stiffness or formality most carefully avoided.

The guests were pleasant, the servants attentive, and the hours fashionably late, so as to allow ample time for everybody and everything.

The breakfast hour was nominally ten, and Sir

Frederick and a few of the more early among the visitors dropped in pretty punctually to the time; but Lady Lyle was always late, and the greater number of her guests followed her example. The letter-bag and morning papers made their welcome appearance at this time, and opened a wide field for gossip and discussions of a graver nature; Sir Frederick buried himself in the columns of "The Times," while Lady Lyle fed Psyche with tit-bits from her own plate, and skimmed through the deeply-crossed pages of fair correspondents, occasionally favouring us with pieces of gossip therein mentioned; and so an hour or an hour and a half was whiled away.

Lady Lyle was passionately fond of flowers, and a very beautiful conservatory was attached to the house, whither the greater portion of the fair visitors usually adjourned after breakfast. Her ladyship, with a pair of scissors and a basket, flitted about among her favourites, here snipping off a faded blossom, and there a withered leaf, and finally making up an exquisite little bouquet for her own peculiar writing table. I frequently aided her in her graceful labours, and received a reward for my assistance in the shape of a sprig of heath or geranium, which Lady Lyle inserted in my button-hole with her own taper fingers.

She made rather a pet of me, to which I had not the slightest possible objection; and when we were better acquainted, which was not very long of coming about, she called me "Charley," a favour which I had most particularly requested, and which she declared it would be very hard to deny me, when she stood there a living woman, thanks to my timely interference.

The forenoon, or rather such as remained of it, was passed by the gentlemen in smoking, billiard playing,

or in a visit to the very extensive stables, where Sir Frederick's numerous equine possessions were passed in review, and long discussions held with the head groom, a canny native of Yorkshire. The ladies took to crochet and carpet work, with an accompaniment of chattering that I should have imagined must have interfered materially with their industry; and some of them disappeared mysteriously till luncheon time, when the continual popping of fat epistles into the letter-box attested that the labours of a private secretary would have been faint in comparison.

I never can conceive what ladies find to write about so constantly when staying in a country house. One would think that subjects were awaiting in a general way, when the usual routine is that of sleeping, eating, drinking, and sleeping again, varied by visits to the garden and poultry-yard, where the sole mentionable incidents are the untintely blighting of a cherished rose, or the appearance since yesterday of a new brood of chickens. And yet the dear creatures peg away at sheet after sheet as though destructive fires and midnight burglars afforded them perpetual themes for detail; once more, what can they write about?

The afternoon passed away very pleasantly. If people wished to ride, horses were at their orders, or carriages for those who were indolently disposed. We made one or two excursions, in a pic-nic style, to places of interest in the neighbourhood, and on several occasions there were dinner parties, generally concluding with a dance, as most of the company were young. I had seen various parties of guests arrive and depart, and still I remained at Egerton; whenever I mentioned an intention of returning home, Sir

Frederick and Lady Lyle instantly negated my proposal, and asked me if I were tired of them. "No;" then why could not I be quiet, and remain where I was?

So I did remain, and nearly a month passed in this manner. I have forgotten to mention that my hospitable host and hostess had two children, boys of four and five years of age.

They were uncommonly fine little creatures, and great favourites of mine; the affection was very reciprocal, but I told Fred. and Willy, to their great indignation, that it was "pudding love," seeing that an unlucky offer one wet morning of drawing wonderful animals for their amusement, had caused me to be besieged by constant requests for the production of alligators and elephants of such marvellous proportions in reference to surrounding objects as would have considerably astounded all lovers of natural history. With a disparity of more than twenty years between them, Lady Lyle was sincerely attached to her husband, and made him a most amiable and affectionate wife. He perfectly worshipped her, which did not surprise me in the least, for a more thoroughly true and delightful woman I have never met. Selfishness was not in her nature, her whole thought was for the welfare and happiness of others. Her servants all adored her, and by the tenants on the property and the poor of the village she was regarded as an angel of kindness and benevolence. There was no parade of her good works; few suspected that the gay, sparkling Lady Lyle, moving about her splendid rooms in satins and jewels of priceless value, had only a few hours before, in a muslin dress and straw bonnet, carried some tempting delicacy or strengthening

cordial to a languishing invalid in one of the lowliest cottages, or spoken words of kindly sympathy and consolation to the lately bereaved widow or orphan.

When I arrived at the terms of intimate confidence with this amiable woman, that it was my pride and pleasure soon to attain, she frequently allowed me to be her companion on those expeditions, and then I learnt to appreciate her true and unaffected excellence. Dear Lady Lyle, were there more angels like yourself in this weary world, it would be a different place to what it is!

It was during one of those walks that her ladyship questioned me as to my views in life.

I told her frankly, and how I had waited long and anxiously, and saw no prospect of any immediate change in my condition.

She laughed so merrily when I had finished, and replied, "So you are down on Lord A——'s list; oh! my poor Charley, that will be a weary wait."

"Will it?" I asked, in rather a desponding tone.

"Yes, indeed!" replied Lady Lyle. "I happen to know for a fact that Lord A—— has about four hundred applicants already, and he gives the same civil answer to all of them: 'So sorry; great pressure at the Horse Guards; will urge them as much as possible,' and so on. Nice prospect that for the poor wretches, who will most of them be centenarians before their commission arrives in the strict course of events."

"Well, I am one of those poor wretches," was my gloomy reply.

"Not a bit of it, Charley," said Lady Lyle, cheerfully; "we will do better things for you than that."

It shall have its commission, it shall, and before very long, too."

"Oh! Lady Lyle," was my reply, "how can you manage that? Is it possible that you will do what you say?"

"You'll see," she answered, in a gay tone; "I have a useful cousin in the War Office, who has managed similar matters for me before now, and when I set my heart on a matter it is not often that I fail."

This was a fact not to be denied, even in my short experience of Lady Lyle's tactics, and I looked hopefully forward to the speedy realization of my long-cherished aspirations.

Certainly, nobody ever had such valuable cousins as Lady Lyle. They occupied every situation under Government in which it was pleasant to have "a friend at court." Did she wish an appointment for some poor friend or old servant, she got it; did she require an order for admission to the best places at any public ceremony or spectacle, a cousin furnished her with the desired document. They were in the army, the navy, the Church, the law, and I never knew her ladyship receive a refusal to any of her requests. Possibly the capital preserves and hospitable invitations of Egerton had a good deal to answer for; but I have long known that "Nothing for nothing" is a highly esteemed and prevalent maxim among civilized beings, and it is very rare indeed to receive favours from any one without a corresponding equivalent.

In consequence of this declaration on her ladyship's part, my hopes, which had lately been rather at zero, went rapidly up to fever heat; and being at this time required at home to assist in entertaining some rela-

tives, I quitted Egerton with great regret at leaving my new and kind friends, but with a very light heart as to my future prospects.

“ Good by, Charley,” said Lady Lyle, as I parted from her in her sweet little boudoir, where I was first initiated into life as it was at Egerton ; “ good by, and come soon again. I can’t spare you long, and Fred and Willy will mourn the want of their monsters ; I shall have to take to drawing them myself.”

“ Good by, my dear fellow,” said Sir Frederick, as he warmly shook my hand in parting ; “ we shall be very dull without you. Remember you are welcome here whenever you like to come, always welcome. Good news soon, I hope ; let us know when you hear from the War Office.”

The kind old gentleman stood on the steps of the portico, and waved his hand to me as my dog-cart turned from the door, and so I quitted Egerton and returned to Langley Park for the present.

CHAPTER III.

“There’s nane like braw John Highlandman.”

SCOTCH SONG.

RAP, tap, tap.

“Come in,” in a very sleepy tone from Mr. Charles Nugent, buried in profound slumber, from which he is highly disgusted at being disturbed.

Enter Groves, who for nearly twenty years has filled the post of butler in my father’s establishment ; a very erect and portly elderly individual, with a high sense of his own dignity and responsibility, and to whom I have only the slight objection that he does not look up to me with the profound reverence to which my eighteen years fully entitle me, and also that he aggravates me in a very serious manner by constantly addressing me as “Master Charles.” Master Charles, indeed ! I who expect in a very short time to be a British officer, bearing the commission of her most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria !

“Fine morning, sir. Brought your shaving water, sir. Past eight o’clock, sir.”

I also have an idea carefully concealed in the inmost recesses of my breast, that Groves has a delicate shade of irony in his voice when he alludes to my

shaving water. This fills me with deep indignation ; and I laboriously cut and plunge at my unfortunate visage, which is as destitute as the back of my hand of anything approaching to a beard, and work up an amazing lather of soap, so as to afford outward and visible signs of the shaving water being a necessary adjunct to my toilette.

But I have my suspicions that this in no way imposes upon Groves. I certainly always hear that unmistakeable twang in his voice.

“ Shall I open your shutters, sir ? ”

“ Oh ! hang it, Groves, don't make such a row ; I'm desperately sleepy. Only eight o'clock, is it ? Come back in half an hour, I'll get up then.”

“ Very well, sir. The post brought a letter for you, sir. Perhaps you'd like to look at it first.”

Groves was decidedly more deferential than was usual with him. “ What's in the wind ? ” was my inward commentary.

“ Hulloo ! a letter, did you say ? Open the shutters, Groves, and give it me.”

A large, official-looking document, with “ On Her Majesty's Service ” in large printed letters on the envelope. The long-looked-for commission !

I tear it open, and skim rapidly its very laconic contents. Short and sweet. I am gazetted to an ensigncy in Her Majesty's 144th regiment of Highlanders !

I wave it triumphantly above my head, and then suddenly remembering Groves, who stands by contemplating my frantic gestures with an air of paternal interest, I faintly endeavour to look cool and dignified, which is difficult for young gentlemen of eighteen under most circumstances, more especially so when sitting

upright in bed, with one's hair slightly deranged, and one's pulse beating a considerable deal faster than usual.

"Well, here's my commission at last, Groves, and precious glad I am to get it. You had better take the letter to my father."

My reception at the breakfast table was of a mixed description. My father congratulated me kindly, but was quieter I thought than was customary with him. My mother kissed me and wiped her eyes, and said—

"Well, Charley, I must try and be glad as you are so."

My sisters liked the idea of having a brother in the army, and had visions of possible reviews and military displays in which I was to assume a very prominent position, to say nothing of balls and luncheons at the barracks, and handsome brother officers accompanying me on future visits to Langley Park.

Tom, who was now fifteen, and a member of one of our large public schools, had by no means degenerated from his early promise.

"Honey or marmalade, general? How will you like sporting a petticoat? By Jove, won't I roar when I put my eyes on your red and white legs. Crossbar pattern, I think, neat but not gaudy."

I affect complete absorption in my employment of salting strips of buttered toast, but Tom knows very well that I hear every syllable, so at it he goes again.

"I say, field marshal, don't you think you had better commence a little 'easy practice on some of Annie's and Flora's crinolines? I say, Flora, that striped fishwife's thing of yours is the precise dodge.

Give it him after breakfast, and I'll superintend him taking a stretcher in the avenue."

"I'll superintend your getting a ducking in the pond, if you don't shut up instanter," is my indignant reply.

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughs Tom, in high glee, "that I should live to see a brother of mine verifying the saying that 'It's ill taking breeks off a Highlandman.'"

A smothered titter from my sisters, and a faint grin which my father strives to conceal behind *The Times*, are quite too much for me. I make an effort to reach Tom's ears, but only succeed in knocking over a cup of tea, the contents of which principally alight on Norma, Annie's pet Italian greyhound, producing a lamentable howling from that unfortunate animal, and great expressions of commiseration from my sisters.

"Oh! Tom, what a plague you are, always in mischief," said my mother, reproachfully.

"Well, I like that!" replied that hopeful young individual; "just as if I did it," and Tom looked as injured and aggrieved as possible.

A delicate wedge of bread and butter had the effect of pacifying Norma, and the remainder of the meal proceeded in a tolerable state of tranquillity.

I lost no time in apprising my kind friends at Egerton of the success of their intervention on my behalf; and having received an intimation from the adjutant of the 144th, that the colonel requested me to repair to head-quarters with as little delay as possible, I made all haste in beginning the needful preparations.

My father as well as my mother had a brother who resided in London; but if uncle Richard was not in

the habit of concerning himself much about his juvenile relatives, uncle Charles (my godfather, by the by) was still less addicted to doing so.

He had been many years in the army, but had long ago sold out; and was now a crusty old bachelor, most precise and particular in his ways, living in a small house in the neighbourhood of the Park. My father usually made an annual pilgrimage to visit his brother, and on one or two rare occasions, one or other of us young ones had accompanied him; an expedition we all regarded with holy horror, for uncle Charles had been a complete martinet in his regiment, and brought the dictatorial and fault-finding propensities therein acquired into private life, causing his presence to be a continual terror to evil doers, and rather a bore to those who were more properly disposed. He had also visited Langley Park once or twice; fearful eras in our existence, in which we voted the sound of his retreating carriage-wheels the pleasantest noise we had heard for some time; but uncle Charles was now grown old, and indisposed to quit his own domicile, and three or four years had passed since I had seen him.

It was therefore no little amazement to us all, and no very deep gratification to myself in particular, that the letter in which my father informed him of the arrival of my commission, was speedily followed by rather a civil reply from my uncle, in which he invited me to make his house my head-quarters while I remained in London, and stated that I should have the benefit of his advice respecting the equipment that would be necessary for me. Unfortunately at this precise time my father's old enemy, the gout, chose to pay him a friendly visit, rendering him quite unable

to be my escort himself; he therefore advised me to accept this invitation, and get on with my uncle as well as I could.

I can't say that I felt any very particular exhilaration at the prospect; but the proposal was well meant, and a very surprising evidence of good will on the part of my uncle, so a reply in the affirmative was forthwith despatched.

I had very little spare time now, but a couple of days were devoted to Egerton, and very happy days they were.

Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle had no other visitors while I remained, so I had them all to myself, and appreciated the advantage. How kind they were, I cannot, need not say.

They both treated me like a dear younger brother; and Lady Lyle's bright eyes were misty and dim, when this, our second parting, took place. I drew an immense collection of the choicest monsters I could invent, for the special delight of Fred and Willy, and left them in their mamma's safe keeping, to be administered in moderate doses of two or three at a time.

The little boudoir again witnessed my adieu.

Lady Lyle glanced at the array of sparkling jewels that graced her lovely white hands, and drawing off a chased gold ring set with one splendid turquoise, she placed it on my little finger, saying, "This will help you to remember us, Charley, when perhaps you are far away." I raised her fair hand to my lips, and bent over it without speaking, for my heart was very full, and for a few seconds there was a rising in my throat, a swimming in my eyes, that may cause some readers to tremble for the storming party that may chance to be entrusted to me in future years. •

"Dear Lady Lyle," I stammered forth, "I shall value this ring very deeply as your kind gift, but it will never be required as a reminder. I shall never, never forget all the kindness I have received from Sir Frederick and yourself."

I suppose the tones of my voice had a tendency towards the pathetic, for a little Skye terrier lying at Lady Lyle's feet, which had been gravely listening with unblinking eyes to our colloquy, suddenly rose, and gave vent to its sympathy in a prolonged and melancholy howl.

There is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. We both laughed.

"Poor little Vixen," said Lady Lyle, "I declare he is quite cut up too, at your departure. Charley, would you like him? you have no dog, I think, and Vixen is such a pet, and will be quite a companion to you."

"I shall be only too glad to have him," was my reply, "if you are sure you can spare him, but I know Vixen is an especial favourite."

"That he is, the little darling," said her ladyship, caressing the unconscious little animal; "and it is not to everybody that I would give him. But I know you will treat him kindly for my sake, Charley, only very soon it will be for his own, he is such a sweet little dog, no resisting his winning ways."

Vixen received all those compliments in a remarkably cool manner, indulging himself with a highly free-and-easy stretch and roll on the carpet, and finally returning to his original position at the feet of his mistress.

"Get up, you lazy thing," said Lady Lyle, pushing

him playfully with her foot; "get up, and follow your new master."

Vixen rises, and I lift him in my arms, Lady Lyle accompanying me to the hall door, where my dog-cart is in waiting, the mare in a very impatient mood, pawing the gravel with her hoofs.

I had bid good by to Sir Frederick in the morning, as he was obliged to attend a county meeting in the afternoon.

My dog-cart sweeps along the avenue, and at every winding, I turn round and wave my hat to Lady Lyle, who still remains at the portico with her two little boys, and waves her handkerchief in return.

Vixen looks gravely into my face, and wonders what it all means.

I have arrived at the last turn from which the house is visible, and once more I raise my hat, and describe unsteady circles round my head with it. A last faint wave of the handkerchief from the portico, and Lady Lyle and her boys are hidden by the clustering foliage.

CHAPTER IV.

COLONEL NUGENT.

It is often the case that when we are about to change our place of abode, and wander forth in search of new scenes and incidents, the old familiar place becomes suddenly invested with a charm it never before possessed.

We never do truly prize anything till we have lost it.

We have dwelt long in one situation, and perhaps all that time could see nothing but faults in it, and have pined for a release, even if the change be for the worse; and yet when we feel that our departure is really at hand, when we realise that we are looking at things and places for the last time, a sensation of regret arises in our minds, and we almost feel a wish that it were in our power to delay our journey, once more to gaze on the old familiar scenes.

I had lived at Langley Park all the eighteen years of my life; but up to the present moment never had I appreciated that lovely home as it deserved.

Its upland lawns dotted with sheep, its leafy woods with the limpid trout stream wandering through their dark recesses, its beautiful gardens laid out in the old style, with intersecting turf alleys, and oh! such sweet

scented flowers, each and all lay spread before me as though I were viewing them for the first time.

Never in all human probability would this again be my home ; I might often be there in years to come, but it would be a mere temporary sojourn, I should be a visitor to my family, one departed from the domestic circle, to be received and entertained as a guest.

Sorrowfully I thought of all this as I went the round of all my favourite nooks for the last time, and bade adieu to many humble friends and well-wishers round and about my home.

Now that I was leaving parents, brothers, sisters, for an indefinite period, what would not I have given to recall much but lightly regarded at the time, that now caused me many feelings of self-reproach.

My kind father, how often had I gone contrary to his wishes and commands, thought slightly of his warnings, mentally sneered at his old fashioned notions. My affectionate and over-indulgent mother, never till now had I felt the force of her too partial fondness for me ; and now it was too late to prove by future conduct that her warm-hearted solicitude was not wasted upon barren soil. Towards my brothers and sisters I did not feel quite so penitential. We had—all things considered—got on very well together ; I was warmly attached to them, and I think they were all very fond of me, and we had scarcely had the average allowance of squabbles and disagreements. Tom bothered me certainly at times, and tried my patience—often pretty severely ; but Tom was a goodhearted fellow in the main, and boys will be boys to the end of time.

I have given one parting scene already, and shall not now describe another. Most of my readers have

gone through similar experiences themselves, and my departure from the paternal roof was accompanied by the usual demonstrations. The express train took me very comfortably to London, and I reached my uncle's domicile in a high state of preservation, and uncommonly hungry.

To my inquiry respecting the well-being of my amiable relative, I received the reply that he had not yet returned from his club, but that I was expected, and my room in readiness.

Refreshments were offered me, but learning that it only wanted an hour to dinner time, I thought it was a pity to take the edge off my appetite, and I therefore decided on waiting, and making up for it awfully by and by.

I accordingly ascended to my own room, a very comfortable one, and turning out the contents of my portmanteau, I proceeded to induct myself into evening costume. I had not been above ten minutes so occupied, when a prodigious rat-tat-tat was inflicted on the street door, and that being instantly opened, a harsh, decided voice was heard exclaiming, "Come, is he? Gone to his room, eh? Ah! very well. Tell him I'll see him at dinner time."

A slow but very decided step ascended the staircase, and the door next to mine was opened and then banged violently, and I could hear the poor devil of a valet catching it famously for something or other; the tones of my uncle's voice were very unmistakable, though I could not distinguish the words.

By and by I heard him leave his room, and then I began to think I had better go down and get the first interview over.

I entered the drawing-room, and found my uncle

already there, scanning the day's paper. He laid it down as I went up to him, and stared at me coolly for a few minutes without uttering a word.

"Now I wonder who you're like," he at last vouchsafed to remark. "It's not your father, and it's not your mother, and it's not me."

"Thank heaven for that last," was my pious inward rejoinder, but I only answered very meekly, "I believe I am considered like my mother's family."

"A pack of city merchants and over-fed aldermen," said my uncle, angrily; "better be like nobody than like them," and he resumed his paper with an insulted air, and took no further notice of me. "A pleasant reception," I thought, but I merely sat down in a chair near the window, where I could get a peep at what was going on out of the tail of my eye.

"How's your father?" in a very gruff tone from behind the paper.

"Quite well, thank you," I reply, very politely; "that's to say not exactly, he has the gout at present."

"Now is he well, or is he not?" in a very excited tone. "Is the boy a natural?"

This is not nice at all, but I am resolved to be very polite indeed, and am entering into elaborate medical details, when the door is thrown open and the butler appears and announces dinner.

"There now, that'll do; I see you know nothing about it. Perhaps a good meal will sharpen your faculties."

We descend to the dining-room, and certainly, if the gratification of the palate were a necessary ingredient in the stimulating of the mental organs, my uncle Charles should have been a very 'cute fellow

indeed. But he eat scarcely anything, touched it, abused it, and sent it away.

I was in a ravenous condition, and seeing that the meal would be anything but a protracted one, I made use of all possible despatch, and the contents of my plate disappeared like magic.

"God bless the boy!" said my uncle, surveying me with amazement; "he eats like a famished trooper. No wonder you are considered like your mother's family; you will soon be qualified for the highest civic honours."

I find I can tolerate his pleasant remarks with much greater placidity now that my hunger is decidedly appeased, and whether my uncle thought his conduct rather inhospitable, or arrived at the conclusion that my amiable forbearance from anything like an evidence of insulted dignity merited better treatment, I cannot say, but gradually his observations became less bluff and sarcastic, and by the time that the butler had put a bottle of fine old port before us, we were getting on much better, and conversing in quite an amicable manner.

Contradiction, I soon discovered, was the leading feature of my uncle's character, though he would not for a moment tolerate it from anybody else.

When I had arrived at this very important piece of knowledge, I found it was by no means so difficult to get on with him as I had imagined.

It was only necessary to agree with him on every point, and never to differ with him in the very faintest degree. In doing this, both he and I frequently veered round in our opinions to every corner of the compass; a listener would have been highly entertained by our contradictory assertions, but my

uncle never observed this little peculiarity in our discussions, and I certainly had no intention of pointing it out to him.

Colonel Nugent (for such was his rank when he quitted the service) had the usual idea entertained by nearly all the old people I have ever met, that nothing was as good, as wise, as excellent now as in the days when he was a young man.

This is a very singular hallucination on the part of our elderly relatives, and would lead one to suppose that in all things we are constantly deteriorating instead of improving, a very bad look out indeed for our grandchildren, and still more remote descendants.

Somehow or other, the present generation are apt to flatter themselves that they have left the dark ages a considerable way behind; whereas the fact clearly is, that we are all much to be pitied for not having lived a century or two sooner, as the elderly relations of our elderly relations no doubt asserted exactly the same opinions as those to which we submissively listen.

We are led to believe that the sun never shines now-a-days as it did then, in which case my profound impression is, that our ancestors about the time of George I. must—unless they had the organization of salamanders—have found it unpleasantly warm. The birds don't sing, the flowers don't bloom as in their youthful days; and as to fruit, the old flavour has departed with the old sun, and as to peaches, nectarines, pine apples, and such like, we must take their by-gone excellence upon tradition, never can we hope to know them in their former perfection.

Perhaps you are dilating on the graceful dancing of Cerito, the fascination of Taglioni:

"Pooh! pooh! my dear fellow, speak of dancing now-a-days! Ah! if you had only seen the dancing I have! what they give us now is mere clodhopping in comparison."

You praise the wonderful powers of Grisi, the unrivalled delicacy of Mario's liquid tones:

"Well, they can sing in a very tolerable manner, certainly—but after the voices I have heard in my younger days, do not be surprised that I think them only so-so."

It is the same in everything else, the very women are not so handsome as the patched, and powdered, and hooped divinities that smiled on them; and yet I think we can show some very tolerable specimens of the fair daughters of Eve, and, for my own part, if one of those ancient Phillises were to re-appear in her beauty spots and her rouge, her armour of whalebone, and her pyramid of hair, and were to range herself alongside of a charmer of the present age and generation, with her coquettish little bonnet and her flowing drapery of airy muslin, I know which would be my selection, and it wouldn't be the mediæval belle.

"I hope you don't smoke, nephew?" asked my uncle, suddenly.

"Why, the truth is, I am afraid I do indulge in a cigar now and then."

"Very bad habit, boy; very bad habit. Sooner you give it up the better. Look at me. I never found it necessary to smoke."

I inspect my uncle as desired, and arrive at the mental conclusion that, if his present far from good-looking appearance is in any way to be attributed to his abstinence from the noxious weed, I shall invest a considerable portion of my available capital in it

without loss of time. But I don't mention this, oh, no! My reply is the very quintessence of propriety.

"Well, uncle, I dare say you are very right. It is a pernicious habit."

"A most pernicious one! an idle, good-for-nothing, dirty custom, and a confounded nuisance! When I went out to India to join my regiment, I found all my brother officers smoking like funnels; old and young, they were at it from morning to night, and from night to morning. I never joined them, but I could not prevent it; but when I rose to the command of the corps, I'm d—d if I did not bring a change over the spirit of that dream. Just let me catch them smoking in my direction, and I gave them a bit of my mind that they did not forget in a hurry."

I had little doubt as to the tenderness of the rebuke, and the pleasant sensation of the unfortunate young ensign who chanced to be caught on guard with a cigar in his mouth.

"In the Colonies it was fully worse," continued my uncle, waxing wroth, gradually, as each unfragrant reminiscence occurred to him; "there everybody was always at it, the men for ever with their filthy tobacco in their mouths, and, by Jove! the women too. At last I came home, and then I said to myself, 'Thank God I have arrived in a country where I shan't breathe that cursed smoke all day long;' but the devil a bit of improvement did I see, it was all the same here."

I respond with a proper degree of sympathy, but wish very much that I could indulge in a quiet weed at that particular moment.

"Not a bad regiment the 144th, I knew it formerly; we were some time at the same station in

Bengal. Colonel was a very sensible man, kept his subalterns in proper order. Tight hand."

I learn with great satisfaction that the aforesaid disciplinarian has been consigned to the keeping of the avenging shades for a space of fifteen years.

"Quite a new set of officers now," continued my uncle. "Ah! the service is not what it once was. Going to the dogs if anything is."

"How is that?" I inquire.

"No discipline, no order, no regulations kept up as they ought to be. The army just an amusement for a parcel of idle young puppies, who feel inclined to play at being soldiers, because they can't kill time in any more profitable manner."

"But surely we have some very fine soldiers, uncle?"

"Not what they used to be, the officers especially. My father was not a wealthy man, and when I said that I had a mind to fight for my country, he bought me a commission, and allowed me fifty pounds a year, not a farthing more. I never asked for more either, and if I had I should not have got it; but on this sum, Charles, my boy, I lived like a gentleman, and kept my own among my brother officers. Let me see any of your young jack-a-napes now-a-days that will do that."

I express my doubts as to the very flourishing state of their treasury, and my uncle continues,

"Now we must have luxuries, forsooth, nothing less will satisfy us. A beardless young ensign, who, till very lately, has been eating thick bread and butter in the school-room, and gnawing a raw turnip, stolen from a field, with immense relish, a young fellow like this must have his *entrées* and his iced champagne,

and will kick up a devil of a row if the haunch is a thought over done. And, perhaps, all this time his family at home are living on the plainest and cheapest food to enable him to gratify his inclination and sport a scarlet coat. Above all things, nephew, be careful in the choice of your companions when first you join your regiment; for in the army, as in every other place, good, bad, and indifferent are to be found. Don't be in a hurry to fall into an intimacy with any of your brother officers till you know a little about them; for it is both difficult and awkward to break off an intimacy once formed, and in such a case you make the party avoided your enemy for life, and no one can tell the mischief such a proceeding may cause. A very short time will enable you to judge of the style of the men with whom you are in daily and hourly association, and a man's general tone and conversation will very soon give you the key to his character. Don't fall into the bad taste of abusing your commanding officer; some young subalterns do that constantly, and let no opportunity pass in which they can hold him up to ridicule or condemnation; but all this is bad style. Do your duty as a gentleman and a soldier, and there is little fear that your colonel and yourself will be on other than friendly terms.

"I dare say you think me an old fool for talking to you in this way," continued my uncle; "and most young men have an idea that they know what to do better than all the fogies (as they choose to call them) in the city of London. But I have rather taken a fancy to you, nephew, and I don't think you are quite so stuck up and self-opinionated as the generality of boys of your age."

This I feel that I owe entirely to my amiable con-

cordance in the views of life taken by my respected relative. But at the same time I also make affidavit that in some of my uncle's observations it strikes me that this rather irascible individual inclines to the common-sense view of the subject.

“ Again, nephew, a very common trick with young officers is to laugh at and turn into ridicule people from whom they have received hospitality. Now this I call both base and ungentleman-like, but for all that it is constantly done, ay, and by men who pique themselves on their good style and knowledge of breeding. Let them talk as they choose, nothing that is mean or heartless is an action befitting a gentleman; and this is a truth, nephew, however silly young fellows may laugh at old-fashioned notions. If you don't care to go to a party, stay away from it; but don't accept an invitation offered from motives of kindness and goodwill, and (whether you have enjoyed yourself or the reverse) return to your barracks, light a cigar, and proceed to detail to your brother officers all the absurdities and short comings that you saw there. I have heard this done by men till I have longed to crack a horsewhip across their sneering mouths, and yet those men called themselves gentlemen, and very fine gentlemen too. I only know such was not my opinion of them. There are some manufacturing towns both in England and Scotland, where the regiments that are quartered there complain that the inhabitants never take the slightest notice of them, which in the first instance has been entirely caused by some insolence they have received from men to whom they have intended civility. I remember hearing of an insult offered to a wealthy manufacturer in a town of this kind, which produced such

an inveterate feeling of hostility towards the military in general, that regiment after regiment go to the place and leave it at the conclusion of their term of service, and during their whole stay not a single resident individual enters the barrack gate. This man, wealthy and hospitable, and with a kindly feeling towards the officers quartered in a dull town where they knew no one, sent some of them an invitation to dinner. The civility was coldly declined, and inside the envelope was inserted a lump of cotton, which, with true gentlemanly feeling was intended to wound the pride of the manufacturer, and remind him of the occupation at which they chose to sneer. I myself know many families who will not admit the acquaintance of military men from a feeling of this kind, namely, that their hospitality will not be received in the spirit in which it is given; but that their honest efforts for the entertainment of their guests will, in many cases at least, meet only with ridicule and contempt."

I assure my uncle, and mean it, that if such is really the case, no one can be surprised at any want of attention from people who may look for such treatment.

"It is the case, nephew, and very often too, more's the pity. Young men are frequently careless and thoughtless, even if not positively bad-hearted. I have often known it happen that a regiment has remained in a place for some time, and the officers have dined with and visited families, who invited them from pure kindness, and expected nothing in return but the civility to which they were most certainly entitled. The route has come, and the regiment has left the town, and those officers have not even

shown the common politeness of leaving a P.P.C. card at the houses in which they had dined. Now people in a general way will not put up with conduct like this, and no one can wonder that when another regiment replaces the departed one, they do not trouble themselves to notice men from whom they have received such rude treatment."

I cannot do otherwise than most cordially agree with my uncle as to the justice of such retribution.

"Above all things, nephew, take my advice, and avoid being one of those conceited, disgusting young fellows who look on women as a class of subjects from which they are at full liberty to take all the amusement they can, and whom they may speak of as they choose. Nothing can be in worse style than a man who talks of women as playthings or victims, and is always hinting at, or dilating on, his conquests, as he is pleased to term them. The senior officers of a regiment can, if they choose, do much to check this kind of thing; but it sometimes happens that on such subjects they set a very bad example themselves. For a man, with a mother and sisters, to be always sneering at women, and telling ill-natured stories of those whom he may be in the habit of meeting, is unmanly in the highest degree; and a true gentleman, Charles, my boy, will always rather avoid the mention of his female friends among the idle gossip and free remarks of a mess-table. No woman is the gainer for being frequently the subject of discussion among a parcel of foolish young officers, and many a girl would blush with indignant modesty could she hear the terms in which she is mentioned at such times. No man would like to hear his own sisters so freely commented upon; and, as I said before, no true gentleman

should ever be guilty of such base, unmanly, and treacherous conduct as that of acknowledging or publicly priding himself on having a warmer interest in the affections of any woman than he has a right to possess."

Just at present those observations do not strike me with the same force that they may do by and by, for I am not in the habit of running down ladies, and look on them as a kind of minor angels, whose slightest notice is a condescension ; but I listen with profound attention to my uncle's sapient remarks, and begin to think he is not such a bad old boy after all.

By this time I think the reader must, in some degree, have penetrated the character of Colonel Nugent, rough and crusty on the outside, but sound at the core. These orations were not delivered in the order in which they are presented, but came forth at divers times and seasons according as the spirit moved him.

Much more he said, and all greatly to the purpose ; but the specimens I have given are quite sufficient for a due appreciation of this worthy but eccentric individual. For my own part, I found him fidgetty and crotchetty in his ways, and sometimes rather peevish ; but on the whole he seemed, as he said, to have taken a fancy to me, and treated me with great kindness.

For the short period that my visit lasted we rolled on very smoothly together, and I afterwards learnt that he had expressed a highly favourable opinion of me to my father.

Our parting was very much more affectionate than our meeting, and, on shaking hands with me, my

uncle left something in my grasp, which on inspection proved to be a cheque for fifty pounds.

“Never mind thanking me, boy, take care of it till you require it, and spend it properly when you do spend it.”

I must not forget to mention that, like a dutiful nephew, I made a peregrination to the City, and hunted out the abode of my maternal uncle, the one who wished me to occupy a stool in his office.

I found him at home, but very busy, and I soon discovered that my absence was a great deal more desirable than my presence, for my uncle had no sympathy with the army, nor with anybody who could be fool enough to select such an unprofitable profession.

He treated me to a small dose of good advice, and wound up his remarks by advising me to be economical and keep out of debt; but he forgot to stimulate my memory by any more weighty demonstration than a cool touch of a couple of fingers, so I think the observations of my uncle Charles found more favour in my sight. Whether I acted upon them, now remains to be seen.

CHAPTER V.

I JOIN THE 144TH.

MY father had presented me with the dog-cart and mare, to which allusion has been made in a previous chapter; and had also given me a capital hack, a handsome animal, with great powers of endurance.

I also brought away a groom from Langley Park, a quiet, active young fellow, son of our old coachman; and he had instructions to travel with the horses, and meet me at the station, on my arrival at the country town, where my regiment was at present quartered.

I accordingly set out on my travels, and behold me arrived.

I found Bob and the dog-cart in readiness; and Bob, in his new groom's livery, with a cockade in his hat, really looked very much the thing; and, in my opinion, the whole turn out had a very knowing appearance.

Bob had already discovered the road to the Barracks, and, under his guidance, I drove thither without loss of time.

The town of A—— was large and straggling, and the barracks were situated at its further extremity, in the midst of a collection of very dirty and dilapidated looking houses. They were in the form of a square,

with a considerable space in the centre, and seemed clean and commodious enough.

It was about half-past five when I entered the barrack-yard, and looked about for some one to whom I might apply for directions.

A sentinel pointed out the officers' quarters, which were on the opposite side of the square; and on driving up to them I perceived a couple of the 144th, in undress uniform, lounging on a pair of camp stools, and indulging themselves in what Colonel Nugent called the pernicious habit of smoking.

They were gentlemanly-looking men, of four or five-and-twenty years of age, and favourable specimens of the corps in question.

Both looked up as I approached, and seeing that I appeared in doubt what to do next, the elder rose, and, taking the cigar from his mouth, inquired politely if he could be of any assistance.

"Thank you," I replied; "I've come to join the regiment, so I suppose I had better report myself. Perhaps you can tell me where to find Colonel Grant?"

"Oh! he's out, but I'll take you to the adjutant. I suppose you are Mr. Nugent?"

"Yes," I replied. "May I inquire if I have the pleasure of speaking to one of the 144th?"

"You have that felicity," rejoined the young gentleman, as I descended from my trap. "My name is Splashton, his is Rynd, and now you know us."

"Captain or lieutenant?" I inquired in a diffident manner.

"Miserable subalterns both," replied Mr. Splashton, "and likely to be that same for many a weary day."

But handles to our names you may dispense with, keep that for the big wigs, of which we are none."

"Neat article that of yours," remarked Mr. Rynd, as I threw the reins to Bob. "Mare looks as if she could go well."

"That she can," I replied. "Regular fast trotter, no need ever to touch her with the whip."

"All right," observed Mr. Rynd, who immediately resumed his cigar and fell into meditation. I afterwards discovered that this young man was not a great speaker, and wasted as few words as possible on any subject.

I followed Mr. Splashton across part of the barrack-yard, and entered a long narrow passage, which after one or two divergements conducted us to the adjutant's office.

An officer came out as we reached the door, who glanced at me in passing, and nodded to Splashton.

The adjutant, Mr. Willis, was seated at a desk writing very busily, and several soldiers were occupied in the same manner. On account of his name the office generally went by the name of "Almacks'" among the young men, a proceeding to which Mr. Willis entertained a strong aversion, as he greatly disliked jokes of every kind, especially those of which he was in any way the subject.

"I don't want a voucher, Mr. Willis," said Mr. Splashton with a laugh, "but I am come as one. I hereby vouch to the safe arrival of junior-ensign Nugent of Her Majesty's 144th regiment of foot, whom I have now the pleasure of presenting to you."

"I really cannot see the wit of those jokes of yours, Mr. Splashton," replied Mr. Willis, testily. "It strikes me that a joke worn threadbare becomes worse

than stupid. I am glad to see you, Mr. Nugent; you were expected to-day." He asked me a few questions civilly enough, and then looking at his watch, said in an impatient manner, "Good gracious! this work seems to grow instead of diminish. Here have I been slaving all day, and not done yet, and the bugle will be going almost immediately."

We took the hint and departed, and as we retraced the passages Mr. Splashton said to me,

"Willis was wonderfully civil for him; he is a crusty old bear as ever was."

"Not so very old either," I remarked.

"Well, not old in years, for he is scarcely forty, but old for a subaltern; and that is why he is so screwed in the temper. It is hard on a fellow to see young fry walk over his head and leave him behind after his long services. I don't think I should relish it myself."

"Very likely not," I replied. "Then I infer that Mr. Willis is poor."

"Poor as Job, but very far from being as patient; he has taken the post of adjutant because it gives him extra pay, and the poor soul is married into the bargain."

"You don't say so," I reply.

"Married, and got heaps of children as all poor devils have. They've luck that way if no other."

"I should think his *ménage* must be rather an uncomfortable one," I venture to suggest.

"I believe you," replied Mr. Splashton; "but old Willis is a worthy old fellow when he off his duty; horse, and we have all a great respect for him, though he does give us precious wiggings at times when he is

in the humour. Wait a little, my dear fellow; like a young bear your sorrows are all to come."

We had now reached the door that led to the interior of the officers' quarters, and Mr. Splashton said to me,

"I'll find somebody to show you your room. You'll find it cool and airy, and if you like a good climb you will be accommodated. It's in what we call the Rookery, first floor down the chimney."

"Curious name," I remark, "suggestive of rural felicity and that sort of thing; besides I'm fresh from a large Rookery at home."

"Yes; but you'll find the cawing here of another description," replied Mr. Splashton. "It won't recall the country much, unless it may be to wish yourself there."

I have not attempted any description of either Mr. Splashton or Mr. Rynd as yet, and must now say a few words respecting them.

Mr. Splashton was of medium height, had a good figure, and was remarkably gentlemanly in appearance and manner. Though not strictly handsome, he was very pleasing, and had a peculiarly sweet smile, which revealed teeth dazzlingly white and even, and gave his face a most agreeable and winning expression. His manner was rather languid, his voice peculiarly so; some people might fancy him guilty of affectation, but Mr. Splashton was not at all affected, only very lazy; and he had in common with Mr. Rynd a very singular hallucination respecting himself, which was their principal bond of union. This idea was that his health was delicate.

Mr. Rynd was a perfect steeple in height, and

broad in proportion. He went by the name of the "big lieutenant," and deserved it.

Mr. Splashton was fair, but he was dark, with clustering black hair and a brown complexion, a voice suitable to his gigantic frame, and the general air of a good-looking giant.

They were both very nice men, and great favourites in the regiment; but they were great invalids in their own eyes. Mr. Rynd, with the strength and constitution of a prize-fighter, had an idea that his nerves were completely shattered and his whole system deranged.

Mr. Splashton, whose complexion was as clear as a girl's, and whose general appearance betokened the most enviable good health, entertained the quaint idea that his liver was diseased and his days numbered.

Nothing could disabuse either of them of their respective opinions, but they heard the bantering remarks of their brother officers with the greatest equanimity, and shortly afterwards sent for a cab and drove off to pay their diurnal visit to the doctor.

The medical men attached to the regiment had only laughed at them and endeavoured to convince them of their absurdity. They heard them composedly to the end, and then went in search of a doctor who knew better.

This they found in the person of a sagacious practitioner in A——, who very speedily arrived at a right understanding of their case; and seeing that if he declined to attend them they would go farther and perhaps fare worse by falling into the hands of a designing quack, he admitted them into the number of his patients, and listened to the history of their imaginary ailments. They underwent a course of

bread pills and liquid decoctions, the chief ingredient of which was cold water properly disguised ; and for some little time past both young gentlemen fancied they perceived symptoms of amendment, and conversed very gravely respecting their improved feelings.

But I am going greatly in advance of my history, for of course I did not discover all this for some little time.

Mr. Splashton and I were standing at the door of the officers' quarters, when we saw three gentlemen in plain clothes coming towards us across the square.

"Here's just the man I want," said my companion, "a rook like yourself, and I rather think your next door neighbour."

The officers approached, and we were introduced by Mr. Splashton ; they were Captain Lacy, Captain Lee, and Mr. Barry, the last named being like myself a denizen of the Rookery.

The two captains had nothing particularly remarkable about them on first sight ; Mr. Barry was a fair curly-haired son of the Emerald Isle, with an air of rollicking good humour, a wide laughing mouth showing two rows of magnificent grinders, and a brogue that I have seldom if ever heard equalled. He was immensely roasted about it in the regiment, but never minded it a bit ; and was very popular both with officers and men. The latter would do anything for Mr. Barry.

On hearing what was required of him, Mr. Barry offered his services on the moment, saying, "Sure, I'm your man, mee dear fellow. I'll show you your room in a twinkling. It isn't over-crowded with furniture at this particular time, but sure it'll be more comfortable when it's made so."

All this with a brogue quite past description.

We ascended two flights of stairs, and a third appeared in view. "Hulloa!" I exclaimed, "this is getting serious."

"Sure an' it is," replied Mr. Barry. "But what can't be cured must be endured. I only hope your bellows are in good working order."

"They would need to be," was my answer, "if this treadmill exercise has to be gone through every time one goes to one's room."

At last we were really at the top, and another long passage lay before us; various doors, open and shut, were visible on either side to its further extremity, and some of the junior members of the 144th were promenading about from one room to another, in different stages of *déshabille*, all however effecting a rapid retreat into their respective apartments when my unknown physiognomy appeared in conjunction with that of Mr. Barry.

"Here you are, mee dear fellow, in the Rookery; and I hope you'll like it on better acquaintance."

He pushed open a door as he spoke, and I beheld my future domicile, which certainly did not cause me to feel particularly exhilarated. It was a low-roofed, square room, perfectly guiltless of carpet or curtains, and its sole furniture consisted of an iron coal-box, a well worn table, and a couple of exceedingly rickety chairs.

I could not avoid mentally contrasting this wretched hole with my late cosy bedroom at home, the downy, warmly-curtained four-poster, handsome furniture, and my own especial lounging chair, in which I was accustomed to recline at my ease, a cigar in my mouth, and my feet protruding from the open window.

"Ah!" said Mr. Barry, with a comical glance, "sure you'll be thinking, as I did at first, that this same is a neat, tasty apartment, to show a gentleman into; but you'll soon get used to it, and be glad it's no worse."

"Worse!" I exclaimed; "is the thing possible?"

"Is it possible? sure, and probable, too, and mighty well off you may think yourself if you get a room as good as this in the long run."

"Good heavens!" I replied, with unspeakable horror.

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Barry. "Just wait a little, till you are sent on detachment, for instance. Sure I've been in places in Ireland where the water came in through the ceiling, and when it rained we lay in bed with umbrellas over our heads, and could have had a shower bath on the shortest notice."

My face of amazement produced a hearty laugh from my good-natured companion, who then remarked, "Stop a minute, we're forgetting business all this time. I'll send my servant for your traps, and you'll have a man appointed for you to-morrow."

While this order was being executed, Mr. Barry invaded several of the neighbouring rooms, and returned accompanied by their occupants, who welcomed me very cordially, and gave me the impression of being a very gentlemanly and unaffected set of young fellows.

Most of them were very good-looking as well; indeed, the 144th piqued itself on containing finer-looking men, both officers and privates, than any other regiment in the service.

I was in my own room, and looking out some things, when I heard my opposite neighbour come over to

Barry's door, and ask him if he had any eau-de-cologne.

"Sure, if I had you'd be welcome to it all; but the devil a drop do I possess in the world."

I cannot avoid hearing every word spoken, for the lock of my door is broken, and the door itself resolutely declines to remain closed.

Happening to have a bottle of the article in question close at hand, I proceeded to tender the desired accommodation, and found myself addressing a young man I had not before encountered.

How handsome he was! by far the best looking of the 144th I had yet seen, though his style was rather effeminate, which he increased by his dress and manner.

He was extremely fair, with the most exquisitely cut features, and a very graceful and aristocratic bearing; his hands and feet were beautifully formed, and very small for a man, and of those marks of gentle birth he was decidedly vain, and lavished no small pains on their adornment. It was for ablutionary purposes that the eau-de-cologne was required.

"A thousand thanks," was his reply to my offer. "My stupid servant never mentioned that my supply was exhausted, and I cannot dress without it."

I handed the bottle to him, and as his room door was wide open too, I could not help exclaiming at what I saw there.

"Pray come in," said Mr. De Vere, for such was his name, "but don't imagine this is a general specimen of barrack accommodation. I hate discomfort of every kind, and usually contrive to make myself very snug wherever I go."

Snug he most certainly was, and I stared with

amazement at the apartment and its owner. A thickly piled carpet was on the floor, and the furniture was abundant and very handsome; but the whole place had more the air of a lady's boudoir than anything else. The window curtains, and those of the elegant little sofa-bed were of white embroidered muslin, lined with rose-coloured silk; a large toilette table, with a white marble slab, was surmounted with a glass in a richly gilt frame, and numerous elegant toilette adjuncts lay scattered about, as well as the contents of a superb dressing-case. A white marble basin-stand occupied a corner, and a sofa and one or two easy chairs stood in tempting positions; over the back of one was carelessly laid a handsome dressing-gown of rich Turkish silk.

Mr. De Vere smiled and remarked, "I dare say you are laughing at me, but I really can't bear living in a mess. The fellows here told me I would get used to it in time, and that it was all nonsense minding anything of the kind; but I am rather luxurious in my tastes, and I never did get used to it."

"But all this must cost no end of money," said I. "And what a bother carrying about such heaps of things."

"But you don't surely imagine that I do anything of that sort," replied Mr. De Vere. "Not a bit of it. I make an arrangement with an upholsterer at every place I go to, and he puts up all those 'fixings,' as the Yankees call them, and takes them back when I leave. Of course I pay him for the same, but I may as well spend my money that way as any other; and what's the odds so long as one is happy."

"In that case I think you are very right," was my answer. "And perhaps you will put me in the way

of getting in a few decent sticks of furniture on my own account. I have strong doubts as to the possibility of either of my chairs bearing my weight."

"Barrack chairs never do," replied Mr. De Vere; "they are for show, not use, as you will find if you try sitting down."

"Then I think I won't make the attempt," I replied; "but in the mean time I had better finish dressing; it strikes me it is getting pretty late."

I returned to my room, and was all ready when Mr. Barry came to volunteer his services in showing me the way to the mess-room; and at this stage of proceedings I think it proper that the reader should have some faint idea of the general appearance of Ensign Charles Nugent, of her Majesty's 144th regiment of Highlanders.

Well, I'm not ugly, there's no doubt of that; but I am not handsome either. I'm rather fair, and I'm slightly freckled, and I have curly chesnut hair, and lots of it. Good teeth—can't they crack nuts, that's all? I've overheard people say (ladies, I mean) that I have such a "nice" expression, but I am not quite sure what it means. Girls always make a kind of pet of me, and chat all their nonsense before me—I don't think they treat me respectfully enough—but now that I am an officer it will be quite another story. I'm afraid I am not fit for the grenadier company, but I am not exactly short either, and all my tailors tell me I have a very good figure. Of course my coats are all padded to a certain extent—everybody's are—and for months past I have nearly torn off my arms by using dumb-bells to widen my chest, so I have quite a broad pair of shoulders, and am sure I look a very respectable representative of the garb of old Gaul.

I've blue eyes, by the by, and I have not bad hands and feet: it's rather odd, but that is about the first thing I notice in man or woman—they certainly do mark a lady or a gentleman more than anything else.

Now, dear reader, I hope you like me; if you don't I can't help it; I did not make myself.

And now, as I am getting uncommonly hungry, and the bugle has sounded, suppose we go down to dinner.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR MESS.

THE first place I entered was a kind of ante-room, or sitting-room, where a number of the officers were assembled previous to the announcement of dinner.

I shall describe it.

In the first place it smelt horribly of tobacco, which was not surprising, as people constantly smoked in it. I think my uncle, Colonel Nugent, would have used strong language if he had come into it without preparation. It was rather a dingy room. The gay uniforms of the various officers contrasted strangely enough with its faded walls and shabby carpet and curtains; the chairs were covered with black hair cloth, and were stiffly ranged along the sides of the apartment; one large sofa followed their example, and a round table in the centre of the room was graced with a tablecloth, which had once been crimson but was now mulberry and black. An old-fashioned mirror surmounted the chimney-piece, in the frame of which were stuck a varied assortment of calling cards, printed notices, railway time bills, and other things of a similar nature. This was the general sitting-room of the officers of the 144th; not a very luxurious one you will allow.

The colonel, being a married man, did not usually dine at the mess, but the two majors were both present, and they welcomed me with great civility. Their names were Thompson and Clavering. Major Thompson was generally described by his brother officers as "emphatically a brick;" and when I had the pleasure of knowing him better I acknowledged that he was one indeed.

In appearance he was not remarkably prepossessing, being a man of six or eight-and-forty years of age, with sandy coloured hair, and features only redeemed from plainness by their strong expression of good-nature and kindness of heart.

But to know Major Thompson was to respect and like him. He would do anything that was not inconsistent with his duty to oblige his brother officers, and was their warm friend in any distress or difficulty. He was also a very thorough soldier, and most perfectly understood his profession; and though a strict disciplinarian in all matters relating to a proper discharge of regimental duties, he was far from being one of those fidgetty men who are for ever finding fault, and will never allow that anything is as it should be. He gave praise where it was merited, and it was always a welcome announcement both to men and officers that Major Thompson was left in temporary charge of the corps. Were any of the men sick, he was soon on the spot, inquiring into the nature of their malady, and doing anything that lay in his power to alleviate it. He knew something of the history of nearly every man in the regiment, and took an interest in their concerns; it may easily be imagined how popular he was among them, for they all felt that in

him they had a kind friend as well as an officer, and soldiers have hearts, and very warm ones too.

He would think it no sacrifice to sit for hours by the solitary bedside of a brother officer on the sick list, and would strive to lessen the tedium of confinement by details that might in any way interest the invalid. On one occasion the worthy major had paid dearly for his kindness. A young officer, who had only recently joined the regiment, was seized with small pox, and all felt compassion for his lonely sick bed, uncheered by the presence of a single friend, but none would willingly run the risk of catching so dreadful a complaint. During his tardy convalescence Major Thompson was the only officer who ventured near him, but he dared the risk, and sat many an hour with the poor boy, who was most grateful for his friendly interest.

But he shortly afterwards caught the disease himself, and numerous marks remained as a proof and remembrance of the major's devotedness.

So much for our senior major. Major Clavering was a very different person.

His age was a mystery, revealed to none, and could only be guessed by the date of his commissions; but as he had come into the 144th by an exchange, even this did not help very much. He was not a young man, however, that was an undoubted fact; but surely a gentleman may be allowed the benefit of the rule adopted towards ladies, that when their face tells their age it is quite unnecessary to ask it, and when it does not it is rude. He was tall, with a splendid figure (oh! how often have I envied it), and his address was distinguished by a polished suavity that marked a man who had seen much of the world, and had

mixed in the best circles. But it was the cold polish of the pebble, there was no warmth in his politeness, no sincerity; his manner was the same to every one, and was not one that invited confidence. Men who had been with him in the regiment for years, said that they had always found him entirely polite and friendly in his way, but that they knew him no better than they did the first day he arrived.

He was a fair man, and his haggard complexion showed that he must once have indulged in many a midnight vigil; but now he abstained from all such amusements, and lived very moderately.

His smile was stereotyped, and had no origin in mirthful feelings; his splendid white teeth had a cold gleam in them that reminded one of Mr. Carker, in *Dombey and Son*; and his light blue eyes had no warmth in their expression, and generally looked as though they were gazing at distant objects, having also a decided objection to meeting those of any person to whom he might be speaking.

Still Major Clavering was a very handsome man, and though the hair was receding from his temples, and leaving the forehead high and bare, and though deep lines furrowed his brow and telltale crowsfeet appeared under his eyes, yet wherever his towering form was seen, bright eyes followed the fascinating major, and many a younger and really better-looking man sunk into complete insignificance beside him.

To ladies his manner was very devoted; he knew the sex well, and no man understood better the art of pleasing women and flattering their little weaknesses; but I am sorry to be obliged to add that his opinion of them was a very unfavourable one, and he usually spoke of them very slightly. He frequently said

that different women required different methods of treatment, but once find the key to their real character and you might twist them round your finger. He was a very accomplished flirt, but preferred married women as the objects of his attentions; he said you did not get compromised with them in the same way as with single ones, and they were more agreeable in general. Stories of all kinds were current about him, success of every kind was attributed to him; each and all were met with the cold, glittering smile, and the same—"Pooh! pooh! my dear fellow, that's all nonsense."

Some said he had met with a disappointment in early life, which had soured his nature and produced his present low opinion of womankind; but the prevalent opinion about him was that he liked himself a great deal too well to have ever cared much for anybody else. He had a remarkable weakness for great people, and would have even put himself a little out of his way for them; it used generally to be said by the juniors—"I say, look at Clavering pitching into the bigwigs; I believe he'd smell a lord fifty miles off."

However, the lords frequently smelt the major too, and I dare say a slight feeling of jealousy had something to do with these criticisms, for Major Clavering was much in request in society of the best description, and usually was on intimate terms with the principal people round the station. But this is a long digression, and I must now return to the ante-room, where I have detained the reader for a considerable time.

About four or five-and-twenty officers were present, and from the cursory glance I then took of them I thought I had rarely seen so many good-looking men assembled together in one place. Though a

Scotch regiment, most of the officers were English and Irish ; there were several Scotchmen in it, however, including the colonel and the chief surgeon. There were eight Irishmen in the regiment, and their comrades laughingly termed them the "Irish brigade."

I must also particularly mention that my brother Tom's prognostications were not literally verified, and the course of petticoat practice he had recommended was not necessary, as both officers and men wore the "trews" and not the kilt. This discovery had been a source of great gratification to me, as I had some slight doubts whether my "understanding" was sufficiently developed for the curt dimensions of the true Highland garb ; had I been in training for the situation of a Belgravian footman, I rather think a pair of artificial appendages must have lined the interior of my white stockings.

Consequently, I mentally rejoiced in the fact that the various members of the 144th encased their nether extremities in trews of a pattern neither gaudy nor sombre, while the ample plaid of the same material was fastened on the shoulder by a handsome brooch, and the whole costume was very striking and effective.

At mess the plaid was dispensed with, and the full uniform coat replaced by a scarlet jacket, loosely fitting, and very slightly trimmed with gold cord.

The mess-room, which we entered on dinner being announced, was a long room, rather narrow, with several windows on one side, and a couple of fireplaces on the other. The table appointments were good, one or two handsome pieces of plate were displayed that had been presented to the regiment, and on guest days several others of a similar description made

their appearance, when the table and sideboard were quite covered with valuable plate, and looked uncommonly dazzling.

A number of the mess servants were in attendance, the viands were of the best kind without any remarkable extravagance, and the wines were of first-rate quality. The whole scene was very gay and animated, and had to me all the charm of the most perfect novelty ; it was a pleasure merely to look at the long row of brilliant uniforms, and listen to the easy amusing conversation and jokes that were freely bandied about from one to the other.

But I was by no means allowed to feel myself in the background, and my brother officers all most kindly sought to make me feel quite at ease among them.

Both majors drank wine with me, and so did many of the others, several of whom I then saw for the first time ; and friendly efforts were made to lead me into conversation, to all of which I responded very readily, and soon found myself on quite a familiar footing with those who sat near me, especially with Mr. Barry, who occupied the chair on my right hand ; that on the left was filled by a very gentlemanly youth of the name of Gordon, very quiet, pleasant, and unaffected. He had a brother a captain in the regiment, of much the same stamp as himself.

Two little incidents occurred during the progress of the dinner which I will record for the benefit of the reader.

The soup had been removed, and the fish was in process of helping, when the door opened, and an officer entered, who was received with a chorus of "The late Captain Lascelles," "Always the last

Percy," "Better late than never," and a few observations of a similar nature.

Captain Lascelles took the remarks very coolly, lounged carelessly across the room, and seated himself in a vacant chair nearly opposite to me, and glancing round the table he nodded to a few of his particular chums, and then set to work to discuss a plate of soup that was placed before him. I was resting on my oars previous to the arrival of fish, so I took a comfortable survey of the very handsome new comer, and while I was doing so he chanced to raise his eyes, which immediately met mine.

Now, there was nothing very surprising in this circumstance seeing that he was almost exactly opposite, but it did strike me as odd that he gave a start so violent as almost to let the spoon fall from his hand, while a flush mounted rapidly to his brow, and he looked at me long and earnestly.

I felt rather confused by this close observation and turned away my eyes, but by and by they were magnetically attracted to look back again, and Captain Lascelles was still gazing at me. This time he looked away, but he did so with an air of wistful melancholy that puzzled me more and more, and several times again our glances encountered each other, always with the same result.

I saw him whisper to the man next him, and concluded he was making inquiries respecting me; in a few minutes a servant informed me that Captain Lascelles would be happy to take wine with me, and we bowed to each other with the same sad look from him.

This was one incident; the other was of a different kind.

In the ante-room I had chanced to stand next a man who was one of the few officers in the corps not positively good looking. He was a coarse, vulgar-looking man, with a loud disagreeable voice and an abrupt manner; I did not fancy him at all, and rather shrunk from his advances. He had also spoken to me rather too much as if I were a boy, and made his remarks in a sneering tone that offended my dignity. Perhaps he saw this, and thought he would torment me a little more.

The chair I occupied was the last vacant on that side, and as Captain Bell stood beside me, I politely made way, and was going round to seek another, when he saw that there was something before him to be carved.

"No, no," he exclaimed, "you are a youngster, stay there and make yourself useful. Boys can't learn to carve so soon." Now this was not polite, my first appearance among them, and said before all the servants. I said nothing, but I am pretty sure I coloured as I seated myself, for Major Thompson said with a goodnatured laugh, "That's a very fine excuse of yours, Bell; you are not over-fond of carving, and I congratulate whatever is coming on falling into Mr. Nugent's hands rather than yours."

I thought this very kind of the major, for it removed my sense of awkwardness and annoyance; but who ever did considerate actions, if not Major Thompson?

I did not, however, feel more amiably disposed towards Captain Bell.

The covers werere moved, and a piece of boiled mutton claimed my attention. I had helped one or two officers, when Captain Bell called out in a loud

tone, "Well, how are you coming on with the carving? Boiled veal, I think. I'll take some, for I ought to patronize you as I imposed it upon you."

"I shall be happy to help you," I replied very politely, "but this is mutton, not veal."

"Oh, mutton, is it?" He added no more, and I supposed did not intend having any.

"I think I said I would have some boiled veal," resumed Captain Bell after a pause of a few minutes.

"But it isn't veal, it's mutton," I answered, still with great civility. "Will you take some of it?"

"I thought it was veal," was his only reply.

Two or three minutes elapsed, and once more Captain Bell said in a coarse sneering tone, "Am I to have any of that boiled veal? I think I'll try it, for it looks young and soft."

Human endurance could no longer stand this. Two or three of the officers were biting their lips to conceal a smile, and I caught an amused glance from one of the servants. There was a sneering, bullying air about Captain Bell that gave me a strong inclination to snatch up the piece of mutton and let him have practical knowledge of its good qualities, but I made a great effort, and preserved a countenance of unruffled serenity.

"A plate," I said, to the faintly grinning domestic; and when it arrived, I carefully selected a juicy slice, covered it scientifically with a proper allowance of gravy, and motioning politely to the place where my amiable antagonist was seated, I said in the most mellifluous tones I could summon, "Take that to Captain Bell, and say that perhaps he won't find it quite so young and soft as he seems to fancy it."

I am ignorant whether Captain Bell eat the mutton

or not, I rather imagine he never received it, and that the servant understood the gist of the message quite as well as the excellent captain himself. There was an angry glare in his eyes that boded no cordial feeling towards me for the future, but I was spared all further attempts of that sort from Captain Bell. Nothing of any kind was said, only Mr. Barry whispered to me, "Tables turned, by Jove!" but the captain had had the worst of that encounter, and the covert smiles visible on several faces, were at his expense this time.

When the ordinary supply of wine was exhausted, the chief part of the officers rose and left the table; several of the seniors remained, however, and ordered more, but I remarked that Captain Lascelles was not of this number.

"Come with me," said Mr. Barry; "it's slow here, we'll go and have some fun."

I accepted his guidance, and we returned by the passages and stairs that led to the Rookery, where I found a considerable sprinkling of the juniors already assembled.

"I say, let's make a night of it," remarked Mr. Barry; "sure it's the right way to welcome a new sub, and if you'll adjourn to my room, why then ye'll be welcome, and I'll have in the liquor."

This proposal met with universal approbation, and a large party of us took possession of Mr. Barry's apartment, to which a varied assortment of good things was very speedily conveyed; and we all set to with the laudable intention of making a night of it.

Loud and uproarious grew the fun: spirits of one kind increased as spirits of another kind decreased, toasts were proposed, including the healths of several

of the belles of A——, and songs in different languages, and of very different sentiments filled up the intervals of conversation.

I must confess, for the credit of the 144th, that the party was almost entirely composed of quite the juniors of the corps; they were really little else than a pack of wild schoolboys, and comported themselves accordingly. The small hours were well entered before we thought of separating, and before that I had seen several of the rioters conveyed by their companions to their rooms, in a condition of the most total helplessness. I had been more moderate in my potations, but I remember feeling a sensation of dizziness as I rose from table, and the walls of the room would unaccountably keep going round, to say nothing of a curious hallucination that I experienced, as if fathomless depths were every moment opening at my feet. I also recollect that on reaching my room, and laboriously succeeding in disrobing myself, I stood for some time opposite my bed, gravely pondering which was the head and which the foot, but not arriving at any decided conclusion on the subject, I pitched in somehow or other, and as it happened I did so in the usual manner.

All sounds were now hushed in the barracks of the 144th, saving only the measured tramp of the sentinels; what sort of night I passed, and what pleasing sensations greeted my awakening, I shall relate in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

WETTING MY COMMISSION.

THOUGH I had probably taken nothing like one-half the quantity of wine and spirits imbibed by many of my companions, still I had drunk deeply, and far more than on any previous occasion during my life.

I slept heavily for some time, and then awoke in a state of burning thirst and fever, my tongue parched, and my throat dry. Not one drop of anything liquid could I find in my room, and unwilling to disturb my companions, I threw myself once more on my bed, and between waking and dozing, a couple of hours passed away, and the morning found me feverish and unrefreshed, an incipient headache crowning all other unpleasant symptoms. Various bugle calls fell unheeded on my ear, till my door was hastily opened by Mr. Barry, who was only half dressed, his toilette being rapidly continued while he spoke. "Oh! get up my dear fellow, there's the *assemblée*, and you'll have to turn out with the rest. The colonel is sure to know you are come, and he's fidgetty about things of this kind."

"Must I really go, Barry?" I asked imploringly; "I feel horribly seedy."

"Sure and it's not surprising, for we had a wet

night, my boy, and I'm not just the thing myself this morning. But you'd better go, it's wiser to begin well; and when you sniff the fresh air, you'll feel better. Here, tumble on your things anyhow, and I'll fetch you some water to dip your face and hands into, no time for a grand toilette at present." The good-natured fellow ran off as he spoke, and I unwillingly emerged from bed, and began to encase myself in my scattered garments.

In a minute Barry returned with a large pitcher of water in his hand.

"Look here!" he cried, "this'll set you up, if anything will. Hold your head over the basin, and I'll pour the contents of this over it, and you'll come out as fresh as a two-year-old."

I did as he directed; the shock of the cold water nearly took away my breath, but it revived me amazingly, and after laving my face and hands, I really felt very flourishing, and quite equal to an appearance on parade. On proceeding to the barrack square, I found the regiment assembled, and the colonel in the act of joining it. He looked at me, and the adjutant immediately named me. "Fall in, Mr. Nugent, fall in," said the colonel; "after parade I'll be happy to speak to you." Looking round I caught Barry's eye, and he signalled me to my place. Being pretty quick of observation, I endeavoured to do what seemed my part in the performance, and I believe I in no way made a fool of myself, though I felt relieved when the parade was over, and the colonel sent the adjutant to desire me to come and speak to him.

Colonel Grant was about fifty years of age, and the finest specimen of a soldier I ever saw in my life; he

looked born to command. His father had been colonel of the regiment, and the son had been born in the foreign station it then occupied, and had received his commission in it as an ensign at the age of sixteen, having gradually risen to his present rank. He was six feet three inches in height, with a magnificent figure, and great muscular strength. His nose was high, and his eyes dark and piercing, and while his hair was much grizzled, and in parts almost white, his eyebrows and moustache were very dark; this imparted a peculiar character to his face, and at all times he was a man sure to attract observation. In his full regimentals no man could more thoroughly look the stately colonel of a fine regiment.

He received me very kindly, asked a few unimportant questions, and then said the adjutant would more particularly inform me of my regimental duties, tell me the hours of drill, and put me *au fait* of anything I wished to know. I thanked him, and then returned to the barracks, where I found a batch of hungry officers just sitting down to an ample breakfast.

"Here, Nugent, come and have a trial of this kippered salmon, it's excellent. Do you a world of good," continued Mr. Barry, as I did not instantly comply with his advice.

"The fact is," I replied, "I don't exactly feel hungry enough for kipper. That remedy of your's was capital at the time, but I feel rather queer still."

"Take a cup of tea," said a low musical voice close beside me; "if you are a little out of sorts, a cup made strong, with very little sugar or cream, may do you good."

I turned to thank the speaker, and found it was

Captain Lascelles. He made room for me beside him, and placed several things within my reach ; his manner was very kind and pleasant, and he gave me the impression of particularly wishing to be on friendly terms with me. I began to feel much interested in him, and we had a good deal of conversation while I languidly sipped the tea he recommended, and which I told him was very far from nice.

"Never mind that," he replied, smiling; "it is a simple remedy, but is often very efficacious."

"I can only blame myself," I said candidly ; "I have had little experience of late hours, and I was not very cautious in what I drank last night."

He looked at me so kindly, and with that strange wistful expression. "You will be wiser soon," he said ; "you are only a young hand as yet, but take my advice and be prudent."

I smiled faintly, and I believe I coloured, for he added, in a low voice, "Do not be offended at my plainness, I should be sorry if you thought my remark impertinent, I meant it in all kindness ;" and I am sure I heard him sigh.

"I knew you did," I added, warmly, "and thank you very much for it." Barry at this moment asked me a question, and when our discussion was finished Captain Lascelles had quitted the room.

Whether it were the tea, or a bottle of soda water, strongly recommended by Mr. Barry, or both combined, I cannot say, but my headache gradually disappeared ; and I set about attending to the several occupations requiring my immediate consideration.

An active-looking young fellow was appointed as my servant, and a most excellent one he proved. He was a Highlander, of the name of Cameron ; and he

very soon established me in my quarters, with an amount of comfort that I should have imagined it would have taken at least a week to bring about.

Some regimental duties occupied me until the afternoon, when, under the chaperonage of the luxurious Mr. De Vere, I repaired to a ready furnishing warehouse, and we speedily selected a number of articles that gave to my squalid apartment a very different appearance, though I was far from aspiring to anything like the magnificence that characterized his appointments. These, and various other purchases, filled up our time completely till dinner claimed our attention, and we returned to the barracks. Several of the officers were absent from mess, among them Captain Lascelles; and, on the conclusion of dinner, the juniors, including myself, once more repaired to the Rookery. On entering my own peculiar domicile, a vast change for the better was perceptible in its interior arrangements, as the articles of furniture I had selected in the afternoon had arrived while we were at mess, and my servant had discreetly exercised his judgment as to the most suitable localities for them.

Really things looked uncommonly snug; and an admiring shout from Mr. Barry, as he threw himself into a huge easy chair, brought in a whole horde of youngsters, who expressed their approbation in various ways, and instantly began testing the excellencies of my different purchases.

"Hulloa!" I exclaimed, "we'll have a regular housewarming. You all turn in here, and I'll send for everything needful."

No pressing was required. Wine and spirits soon arrived in abundance, tobacco smoke in clouds obscured the apartment, and fun fast and furious was the order

of the night. The scene of the night before, the headache of the morning, the kind warning of Captain Lascelles, all were forgotten or unheeded; I was the master of the revel, and felt it incumbent on me properly to support the character.

Songs sentimental and merry, jokes stale and new, stories and anecdotes mostly of a very free and easy description, were the staple of the entertainment, and hours passed in this injurious and unprofitable manner.

Fresh supplies of liquor came and disappeared, and yet again and again were our glasses replenished. We drank each other's healths, and the toasts were duly honoured and responded to, and I may say, in plain terms, that the uproar was terrific.

One by one my companions dropped off. Some rose unsteadily and staggered off unaided, while others fell at the first attempt, and were carried to their respective apartments by the more sober of the party.

It was a disgraceful and a disgusting scene, and even now when I recall it I blush to think that I was once an actor in anything so degrading.

The beams of the morning sun witnessed the conclusion of the entertainment, and shone into a room reeking with fumes of tobacco and smelling most horribly of brandy and whiskey punch, while chairs lay scattered about as their occupants had knocked them over in attempting to rise, and the table presented a spectacle of mess and confusion only to be seen on such occasions.

One helpless individual lay on the sofa in the heavy sleep of intoxication; while Mr. Barry, in a similar condition, had again subsided into his favourite large

chair; all the rest had departed or been conveyed to their own rooms.

I had fallen asleep at table, my head buried in my hands; but some noise aroused me, and I awoke to a kind of partial understanding of my situation, and, after glancing round at the sickening spectacle before me, I staggered to my feet, and threw myself, all dressed as I was, on my bed, where I fell into a profound slumber.

This time it was my servant who disturbed my repose.

Oh, the horror of that awakening!—shall I ever forget it?

The splitting, tearing headache, the deadly sickness, the parched, clammy lips, the burning throbbing of the eyeballs, the motes dancing before my eyes, the utter inability to move my head or raise it for an instant, without feeling—oh! so fearfully ill.

“Water, water!” I cried; but when he brought it I motioned it away, the exertion was an impossibility.

Cameron looked at me compassionately, and said, “I am afraid, sir, you feel very poorly; do you not think you can get up?”

“Oh! no, no!” I gasped.

“Try, sir; you may feel better if you rise.” I tried, and fell back in an agony.

It was getting late, but I knew I could not attempt appearing on parade, when a tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Captain Lascelles, looking grave and anxious.

I felt much ashamed that he should see me in this condition, and made an abortive attempt to speak; but he said, “Hush!” in a low voice, and gave some

directions to Cameron, who left the room, but very soon returned with some things in his hand.

"I feared you would be out of sorts this morning," continued Captain Lascelles in a kind tone, "for your room is just over mine, and I knew you were very late. Drink this," and he held a glass in which he had just mixed something.

I did so, and in a few minutes felt an astonishing cessation of the miserable feeling of nausea, while a partial clearness was restored to my disordered faculties, though my head still ached violently.

Captain Lascelles then dipped a towel in cold water, wrung it slightly, and twisted it round my head.

"You must make an effort and appear on parade," he said, kindly; "what I have done will carry you through it, you can then return to your room. I am your captain, and will manage your escape from anything else to-day, but Colonel Grant will miss you if you are absent, and the cause may annoy him; it is a pity you should have anything unpleasant so soon."

"Oh! Captain Lascelles," I exclaimed, "how shall I thank you? how very, very kind you are."

"When you are better I shall read you a lecture," he replied, and he gave me a look so kind and sad that I felt I loved him from that instant.

A few minutes saw me descending the stair and in the open barrack-ground; but before the parade was over my former symptoms were fast returning, and I could scarcely stand or move without everything swimming round me.

The instant we were dismissed I dashed up to my room, and again flung myself on my bed, as bad, nay worse, than ever. Once more the hand of friendship

came to my aid, and Captain Lascelles followed me almost immediately.

With Cameron's assistance he succeeded in undressing me, and no woman's touch could have been lighter or more tender. He smoothed the hair back from my aching forehead, and bathed it with a cool essence; once more I drank a mixture he prepared for me, and then I laid my head on the pillow, and soon a soft dreamy sensation came over me, the light was obscured by his directions, and a long, sound, refreshing sleep fell on my disordered brain.

I slept for many hours, and when I awoke the afternoon was far advanced, and the dark shadows of evening were gradually approaching.

My headache and sickness had entirely disappeared, but I still felt weak and disinclined for any exertion. A caraffe of sparkling cold water was placed on a table within reach, and the long draught I eagerly took seemed more delicious than any nectar.

I lay awake for a considerable time, musing on the occurrences of the previous days, and resolving that my present proceedings must be stopped before it became too late, for I had sense enough clearly to see the folly of the conduct in which I had been indulging.

By and by my door was quietly opened, and the inquiring visage of Cameron was silently inserted.

"Oh! you are awake, sir. I hope you feel better."

"Much better, thank you, Cameron; I have slept a long time." I felt ashamed of the opinion my own servant must have formed of me, and inwardly determined he should never again witness a similar exhibition.

"If you please, sir, I was to tell Captain Lascelles when you were awake, in case you wished to see him."

“Ask him to come now, Cameron, if he is disengaged. I shall be very glad of his company.”

In a short time Captain Lascelles came upstairs, and I must now devote a space to the description of the kindest, the truest, the most sincere friend that ever was possessed by mortal man, and one to whom I owe more than pen can tell, but who shall live in fondly cherished memory while a pulse remains to throb at the mention of his name. Percy Lascelles, dear Percy Lascelles! Tell me not of the friendship of women, or of the most devoted love of man for woman! Never can it approach in truth, in fervency to the feeling of friendship that is experienced by men for one another in cases where they are friends indeed. Men think, feel, and suffer far more deeply than women. I know the sex think that the opposite is the case, and that they are the especial victims when the suffering lot of humanity is more immediately in question, but it is not so,—men may conceal what they feel better than women, and no outward and visible sign may denote that a deep and agonizing wound is rankling below; but it is there, lacerating them to the very heart's core, and all the more keenly felt that it is apparently scorned and unheeded by them.

Young and inexperienced as I was, something of this nature had glanced across my mind in reference to Captain Lascelles. I could see, too, that conflicting emotions were frequently at work in his mind; and it struck me that while some event in his past life had embittered his ideas of things in general, and had turned the better feelings of his nature into those of scorn and indifference, yet, again, there were times when some softer emotions had full sway, and Percy Lascelles became almost womanly in the display of

feeling and gentleness that characterized him on such occasions.

It was this mixture of indifference and touching gentleness that constituted the principal charm of his manner, and no one who knew him well could possibly resist its fascination, but to very few did he show himself thus; he was usually listless and uninterested in all that was passing, and though on easy and friendly terms with his brother officers, he had apparently no preference for any of them, and very few of them cared for him, except as a member of their corps with whom they were on perfectly good terms, but of whom they knew as little as could well be under the circumstances of daily and hourly association.

But I shall leave his character to develop itself in the course of this history, and shall now only give a slight sketch of his personal appearance.

I don't know how other people feel on this subject, but I confess to having always a strong curiosity as to what individuals are like in whom one is intended to take an interest.

I wish to know if they are plain or handsome, tall or short, fair or dark, in fact I like to hear something about them, and try to realize them in my own mind.

So I hope the reader will take an interest in Percy Lascelles. Certainly if the possession of good looks entitles a person to that distinction he well merited to be the observed of all observers.

Upwards of six feet in height, a figure graceful and easy, and at the same time most manly in his bearing; a complexion considerably bronzed by exposure, and very dark hair and eyes, while his white teeth gleamed beneath a slight silky moustache, and his smile, rare and evanescent, had a charm peculiarly its own,

though it was too often tinged with an expression either bitter or melancholy.

His eyes were very beautiful, dark and lustrous, and at times they had a look of pleading softness that was almost feminine, while on other occasions they could glitter with a cold sarcasm and indifference that changed the whole character of his face, and at such a moment Percy Lascelles was under the dominion of his darker nature.

I never said he was faultless, I could not with truth, but his errors were those of a noble disposition; not one mean or grovelling idea sullied the mind of one who never forgot that he was a gentleman and a soldier. His temper was hot and hasty, but he never harboured a feeling of resentment after an error was acknowledged; and if he reflected in cooler moments that his natural warmth of disposition had led him further than he intended, no false pride withheld him from owning the truth.

In a general way he cared nothing for the opinion of others; he had been early soured with the world, and now retaliated by a supreme contempt for its ideas and practices.

His view of human nature was a dark one; he believed in little that was excellent and sincere, and looked on the world in general as heartless and false-seeming, never caring to search if some truth might not still exist among the mass of caprice and insincerity that he chose to consider its leading characteristics.

He was strongly imbued with fatalist principles, and in consequence abstained from struggling against what he imagined he was powerless to resist; but I am going on too far, and am anticipating a know-

ledge that only came to me by slow and gradual degrees.

I said that he had desired to be summoned when I awoke, and he now sat down on the edge of my bed, and after inquiring how I felt, we conversed for a short time on indifferent subjects. I had now begun to feel a strong desire for his good opinion, and feared that his present ideas respecting me must be of anything but a favourable description.

"Captain Lascelles," I said, raising myself on my elbow and colouring as I spoke, "let me thank you very much for your kindness to me since my arrival here. You will think that your kind warning was entirely thrown away, but it is not so; I hope to profit by it now, I mean to turn over a new leaf, and I trust you will believe that the events of the last two nights are very unusual with me."

"I feel sure of it," he replied. "It is your perfect inexperience of such scenes that has caused you to suffer so much. Your head is too unseasoned to stand such a sudden outbreak."

"Well, I hope it will remain so," I answered; "for I am much ashamed and disgusted when I think of the whole proceeding, and I trust your good offices may not again be required in a similar case."

"It will be better for yourself that they are not," he replied; "but at the same time I feel that some explanation is necessary for my conduct towards you; it may surprise you that I have taken so active an interest in your concerns, God knows it is very unusual with me," and he sighed very deeply.

"I can only repeat my thanks, Captain Lascelles. Whatever may have been your motive, it has been a very kind one."

He was silent for several minutes, and I lay covertly gazing at the contending emotions that were agitating his handsome countenance. Then he spoke, but in a low voice, and with his head turned from me.

"I saw you were surprised at my looking at you so constantly the day you joined; but had one who has been long dead risen and appeared before me, I could scarcely have been more startled than when I first saw you."

"Some strong resemblance?" I asked, inquiringly.

"A resemblance so perfect, so astonishing, that unless in the case of twin-brothers, I have never before seen the like. I cannot tell you what I felt on first seeing you;" and again he was long silent.

"Captain Lascelles," I said, "I am afraid it pains you to speak of this; do not say any more unless you wish it."

"I wish it," he replied. "I said that I should lecture you on your recovery," and he smiled a melancholy smile; "and I shall tell you what I hope will act as a sad warning. I shall first tell you that though our acquaintance is but of a few hours, I cannot regard it as such; I feel as if I had known you long and well—very, very long."

"And I hope that such will yet be the case," I replied, eagerly. "You have shown me such kindness that I should be most ungrateful if I did not feel it deeply. I do not now look on you as a stranger, Captain Lascelles."

"Do not," he said, with much warmth. "Believe me you have a friend in me, and one who will do much, much for you."

He pulled a chair towards him, and resting his arms on it, he shaded his eyes with his hand, while I

lay still and listened, never interrupting him, and never noticing the pauses that frequently occurred in his story.

"You are so like a young brother of mine now dead, that as I said, I could almost imagine the grave had given up its tenant, and that he was again restored to me. Your manner, your voice, everything, all are so similar, that at times it is almost more than I can bear. I cannot tell you how dear he was to me; I never had a sister, and he was so young, so gentle, and when a child so delicate, that he had always been to me an object of protecting fondness—and he loved me so dearly—oh! so dearly."

Captain Lascelles' voice sounded husky and broken. I almost wished he would spare himself the relation of what wrung his heart so deeply, and I took the hand that was nearest me, and held it in mine while he spoke.

"His name was Charles, also. We always called him 'Charley.' I had an elder brother then, but he is dead too. When Charley was a child, he was playing in the grounds one day, and his foot slipping, he fell into a stream, there very rapid and deep. I was in another part a little way from the water, when the maid's scream of horror as she ran frantically along the bank, warned me of what had taken place.

I looked, but I could not see him, a branch under the stream had caught him, but the girl showed me where he had fallen in, and I dashed into the water, and felt about in every direction. When almost in despair, I found him, and dragged him to the edge of the bank; but he was pale, cold, and senseless, and in an agony I feared that he was dead, he had been so long in the water. I carried him home in my

arms, and when I looked on his little face, so pale and still, a sickening feeling of dread came over me. My own dear little Charley! was he never to speak to me again. Hours passed, and he remained in an unconscious state; every remedy was tried without effect, but at last, when all hope was almost at an end, he sighed faintly, and a shade of colour came into his lips and cheeks. My joy was as great as my previous grief—never till then had I known how much I loved him—never had I felt what it would be to lose him. Ever after I loved him, if possible, better than I had done before, and oh! how truly it was returned.

When I returned after an absence from home, it was to see Charley that I most looked forward to; and all his childish and boyish letters, how I prized and treasured them. I have them all still—every one of them. He was the dearest, the most affectionate child, and he was the same as a boy. He had no fault—none in my eyes.

By this time I had been some years in the army; and when Charley (whose whole ambition was to follow me in everything) was sixteen, he decided that he must also be a soldier. My father offered no objection, and all the necessary steps were taken. A commission was more easily obtained then, and a choice of several regiments was offered to them. Charley as usual consulted me before deciding; and as all were equally good, I recommended his choosing one in which one of the subalterns had been much in my set at college, and whom I remembered as a kind-hearted good sort of fellow, who for my sake, and for old days would most probably give a helping hand to my young brother. I was absent with my regiment

at the time, and could not get leave to accompany Charley as I wished; but it would have mattered little—it was his fate.

I wrote to my quondam friend, and he sent me a kind reply, saying he would look after the youngster, and in high health and spirits Charley set out to join his regiment.

One or two letters I had from him, just after he joined; so happy, so pleased with everything, and everybody so kind to him. Then came a pause, and for days I looked to hear from Charley, but the post came again and again and no letter. I was scarcely uneasy, for I fancied his new duties and occupations might be engrossing him very much, still it was unlike him, and once or twice I felt I should be glad to hear that he was well.

But one morning there came a hurried note from the friend I have mentioned, saying that my brother was ill, some sort of fever; that he did not know my father's address, and that he thought I had better come there at once, as there were some symptoms the doctor did not like.

A cold shock came over me as I read; I felt the worst. Leave was at once granted me, and I never halted till I reached my brother's barracks. My father was in bad health at the time, and could not leave home.

As I arrived at the door my friend met me with an air of embarrassment. I could not ask the question I wished, but my eyes must have looked it, for he said, "Yes, he is alive, but, Lascelles, I must prepare you for a great change; he is very ill."

"He is alive," I said. "Take me to him."

He had said I must expect a change; but, O

God! shall I ever forget the spectacle that met my eyes.

Was that my brother—my strong, healthy, bright young Charley? I could not believe what I saw; and looked round in speechless horror and amazement.

Thin to perfect emaciation, pale as one ready for the grave, save two bright hectic spots that burned on his cheek bone, eyes glassy and glaring with the fire of frenzy, and his fair young brow marked with numerous leech bites, from which the dark blood was slowly welling, his head rolling wildly from side to side, his arms tossed over his head in frantic delirium—was this my brother?

“What has caused this?” I asked. My friend hesitated and seemed confused, a doctor in attendance looked grave and busied himself in some preparation, the nurse said, with feeling,

“It’s past mending now, sir; the poor young gentleman has had a bad fever, pray God that he may come through it.”

“But surely something caused it,” I replied. “My brother left home in perfect health, not three weeks since.”

“The fact is, Lascelles,” said my friend, “I’m afraid poor Charley went a little too fast after he joined us, wetting his commission, and that sort of thing.”

“Wetting his commission!” I replied. “Am I to infer that this is a fever brought on by riot and intoxication? Why, Charley was sobriety itself.”

“Yes, but you see those young fellows have so little discretion. They get excited, and there is no holding them in.”

“Haining,” I said, looking at him gravely, “I

asked you to be my brother's friend. Could you not have checked him in this, if it indeed caused his illness? It was not done at once, many hard nights of dissipation were necessary to bring the poor boy to this," and I pointed to the wasted figure on the bed.

"Lascelles, it is done," he replied; "God knows the sorrow it has caused me, but I never thought of this. I never did."

I heard it all then and afterwards. The friend to whom I had myself recommended my darling brother was the man of all others he should have shunned. He had been gay and rather free at college, but was now a man of reckless and dissipated habits, not ill-meaning, but the worst companion a boy could possibly have. He had led Charley from one scene of dissipation to another; forced him to drink often against his inclination, though the poor boy had sometimes in his youth and inexperience yielded to the force of gaiety and example, and joined willingly in the convivial meetings of his companions.

Oh! how my heart bled when I heard it all, and remembered, as I miserably did, that I had selected this regiment, this friend. I shall not dwell much longer on this sorrowful time.

For three days and nights I never left my brother's couch; everything that could be administered, by stratagem or force, was given by me; I allowed no one else to touch him. Mine only should he be for the little time I should have him. I sat in the long night watches and heard his wild shrieks—his feeble moans. I heard him beg and pray for "Percy, dear Percy, would he never come?" and all through his closing hours he called for that beloved brother, and

never knew that his eyes never quitted him for an instant, and that he would have given years of life for one single loving word, one glance of recognition.

Years have passed since then, but it is still fresh in my memory ; no time will ever efface the recollection of that sad, sad period.

He grew weaker and weaker, and I felt it would soon be over. When the fever left him perfect exhaustion succeeded, no interval of restoration of his faculties was ever given him.

He sunk lower and lower, and he died in my arms, for I held him in them for hours at the last, but none could tell the moment when his young spirit took flight ; it was long before I could persuade myself that I held only a form of senseless clay.

When I stood by his open coffin, and ere it was closed took my last look at the boy I had loved so well, it seemed to me as if happiness could never again be my portion—the very face of nature was darkened for me.

A kind of brain fever had caused his death, brought on by continued overexcitement and excess ; no friendly voice was at hand to tell him of his error, he only heard the language of temptation and ridicule, and young and inexperienced, he became its victim. From never having been very strong the effects were more rapid than they would have been in one more robust, but such was the account given to me, and I had no reason to doubt its correctness.

I have told you a melancholy tale, Nugent, and I see that I have your sympathy ; be warned by my brother's fate, and shun the errors into which he was led. You may believe that I have not mentioned those circumstances to many ; I am not one to care

for the compassion or interest of people in general, and till this day no stranger has heard what I have now told you.

But my interest in you has been strongly roused by your extraordinary likeness to one so dear to me, and for his sake and much loved memory I would be your friend, if you will allow me."

I clasped his hand in both of mine as he spoke; no word sealed our unspoken compact, but from that day we were friends indeed.

Lascelles remained for some time in an unbroken reverie. I respected his feelings, for I saw that he had been much moved by those by-gone recollections, and I also saw that he was not a man who cared much for spoken sympathy.

His next remark was on quite a different subject, nor did he again recur to what he had previously said.

Soon afterwards he rose and left me, and I remained in bed reflecting on what he had told me, and undisturbed by any of my brother officers, for I desired Cameron to keep watch and see that no one was admitted, as I had no great wish for their company on this particular evening, nor indeed was I equal to joining in their wild demonstrations and noisy good spirits.

I may as well mention now, that this was the first and last occasion on which I was guilty of forgetting myself in the manner I have described.

My own feelings, as well as the friendly warning I had received, withheld me in future from making one in similar scenes of riotous conviviality; and though I was no anchorite, and no one more thoroughly enjoyed a gay supper party than myself, I was never

again betrayed into the degrading vice of intoxication, and I never more exceeded the limits of moderation and sobriety.

Some of my companions laughed at me at first, and strove to chaff me out of my determination to remain no longer than I felt myself safe ; but I stood their bantering observations very composedly, and they soon gave over trying to combat my resolution ; indeed, they were (with the exception of Captain Bell) much too good-hearted and gentlemanly to persevere in anything that might seriously annoy me, and to his opinion and jeering remarks I attached not the very slightest importance.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BELLES OF A——.

I WAS not very long of “shaking into my shoes,” to use an expression more forcible than elegant.

Being inclined naturally to view matters generally in a philosophic point of view, I took things very much as I found them, and did not bother myself in any way about them. If they could be improved, I sometimes set about the task of amelioration; if they were bad, and likely to remain so, why there they remained for me.

Depend upon it, reader, this is not a bad plan, if you wish to get through life with no more than the average amount of worries.

Taking it all in all, I found my position in the 144th a remarkably pleasant one. The colonel was a gentleman, strict, without being a martinet, and the regiment stood high in popular opinion, and was an uncommonly fine body of men, high-spirited, and, at the same time, perfectly well disciplined.

The officers were, with very few exceptions, a most gentlemanly and pleasant set of fellows. The band was first-rate, and our readiness to make it of service when required had greatly increased our popularity in

A——. The mess was a very good one; barrack accommodation far from bad; we were within a moderate distance of London. What more could any reasonable men require to make them tolerably contented with the world and themselves? A—— had its society too, and a very pleasant society it was.

The people, generally speaking, were well affected to the military; indeed, the tea-parties would have been sadly deficient in “nice young men,” had the parental authorities suddenly resolved to extend no more invitations to the barracks.

But they did not seem to think that deprivation necessary, either for the peace of the community or its morals, for the mess-table was usually strewed with tiny epistles, of all shapes and sizes, containing invitations to every variety of entertainment, from the dinner of many courses to the snug little family coterie.

I am sitting at breakfast a few mornings after my arrival, and with great avidity am pitching into the different viands, my appetite having received a stimulus from an unusually protracted drill.

“By Jove! Nugent, it does one good to look at you,” said Captain Lacy, with a laugh. “I’d rather board you for a week than a fortnight.”

“Sure, if Splashton could take a leaf out of his book this morning, it would be more to the purpose than measuring out sufficient for a bullfinch. Do you find your liver discomposed, mee dear fellow?” and Barry assumed an air of affected sympathy.

“Not just the thing to-day,” replied Mr. Splashton, cheerfully; “but, oddly enough, I feel particularly hungry, and that I know is a bad symptom.”

“There can be no doubt of it,” answered Mr. Barry, gravely. “I don’t know a worse sign of a man’s

health than when he feels as if he could eat the table, cloth and all, with salt or without it."

"I wish somebody would take Rynd away from this end of the table," exclaimed another of the party. "He's drained the urn of every drop of water in it, to weaken his tea, and has drank about a dozen cups under my very nose. He'll swell soon, like the young woman in *Pickwick*, or go off in spontaneous combustion, or something of that kind."

"I'm afraid, Marsh, your medical knowledge is of a limited description," replied Mr. Rynd, as he rose to ring for more water; "and if your nerves were as troublesome as mine....."

"Sure, Rynd, it's more than Job could stand, to hear you speak of nerves," interrupted Barry in an indignant tone; "you, with a fist like a prize fighter's, and that can bend a poker round your neck."

"Some constitutions are peculiar," replied Mr. Rynd, gravely.

"Some people are," rejoined Mr. Barry, making a vigorous onslaught on a huge ham, "and don't know when they are well; and sure it would serve them right to have nerves, and to feel them too."

"It must be very unpleasant to be nervous," put in little Gordon, with naïve simplicity. "I know I was in an awful funk once, at something, and I felt shaky about my knees, and cold shivers all down my back, and I felt all overish and nohowish; it wasn't nice at all."

"Had you seen a ghost, Geordie, my boy?" inquired Lacy.

"Not exactly that," answered little Gordon; "but I was coming past a place where a man had been murdered, and people said he sighed at night, and my

jacket caught in a branch, and I felt rather queer for a minute."

"Thought he had got you, did you?"

"Well, you know, it gave me a start."

"Ah, Geordie! the ghosts might come after a little bogtrotter like you, but they wouldn't bother Rynd; he'd be one too many for them. It's serve the ghosts out he would."

"By the by, it's band-day," observed Splashton.

"Nugent, you must get up extensively, and pitch into the girls."

"There's rather a good lot here," remarked Pearce, a subaltern, who sat next me; "some jolly fast ones among them."

"The Thompsons are capital fun. You must get introduced in that quarter; it won't be difficult," remarked another.

"Who are they?" I ask.

"Oh, great fun! Up to anything, and ready for anything, and very pretty into the bargain."

"How many are there?" I inquire.

"Four charmers, and every one of them goes on a different tack; so if you have any particular fancy, you are likely to be suited. They are all waiting, and ready for promotion."

"Do you mean that they want to get married?"

"Pre-cisely! and have not neglected any chance of doing so these half-dozen years; but they don't appear to have the right kind of bait. Matrimonial fish won't nibble."

"Or if they do nibble, they are never landed," said Lacy with a laugh.

"The fact is," said Splashton, "they are too civil by half, and to everybody, and Mrs. Thompson

frightens people by letting her motives be too plainly seen."

"By the by, none of us have been asked there for some days. I wonder what they are after?" said Captain Lacy.

"They'll all turn out to-day, and we'll trot out Nugent. By the by, Nugent, are you an eldest son? because if so, old Mother T. will eat you up with civility."

"No," I reply, "I am only Jock, the laird's brother, so I am safe from Mrs. Thompson. I am not an eligible."

"Sure, then, she'll take you up on her own account, mee boy," said Barry; "is it not myself that recollects how she trotted me up and down one whole afternoon while Fanny was pitching into Major Clavering, and poor innocent deluded me wondering what the old lady was after all the time."

"Precious lost time it was too," remarked Captain Marsh; "the major is too old a bird to be caught by the chaff of any Thompson of the whole lot; whereas I do believe, Barry, you were very nearly in for it: Miss Fanny had walked into your young affections pretty considerably."

"Sure she's a nice little girl at this minute," replied Barry, "only thinking she may perhaps catch Clavering spoils her, for she can't be civil to anybody else when he is there."

"We must introduce Nugent to the Vanes, and let him in for their dance on Friday. They will be sure to ask him."

"Now, who are the Vanes?" I inquire.

"Well, I suppose they have had grandfathers and grandmothers like the rest of us," said Splashton,

"but I can't say I ever heard of them. All I do know is, that they are the jolliest old couple going, give the best feeds, and the nicest parties in A——, and that Lucile Vané is out-and-out the most stunning young woman in a general way that ever it was my good fortune to encounter."

"Is she an heiress?" I inquired.

"Lots of tin, I believe; the old governor made heaps in the City once on a time, and Lucile will have it all. Oh! isn't she a nice girl!" continued Splashton; "shouldn't I just like she—if she'd have me. Such ankles, and such a heavenly figure; not one of your lanky articles, but as plump as a little partridge; and she's not little either; just the right height."

"Why, Splashton, you speak exactly as if you were a New Zealander with a promising appetite," said Lacy, laughing: "I wonder what Fanny Thompson would say if she heard you! Pistols and coffee for two would be about the right thing."

"Oh! hang Fanny Thompson, she's never to be compared to Lucile Vane.

'Of all the girls that are so smart,
There's none like pretty Sally,
She is the darling of my heart,
And she lives in our alley.'"

"Well, I like that, Splash," said Captain Marsh; "you are not at all fickle, oh, no! It was not Fanny Thompson last, and then Miss Gray, and before that little Rose Trevor, and that tall Miss Wylde."

"I deny Miss Wylde altogether," replied Splashton; "I entirely repudiate admiration in that quarter,

unless it might be thinking she would be a credit to the Grenadier Company."

"Now that won't do, Splash; you know you were awfully spooney for a time. In fact, I don't think you were quite cured till she told you that she travelled in Spain with scarlet inexpressibles, and rode on her mule like a man. I think that rather staggered you; and then Fanny Thompson came on the *tapis* with her pretty little lisp, and her quotations from Tennyson, and they did for you, my boy."

"Well," said Splashton, "I believe Miss Wylde is not so bad after all, if she would not go stuffing her absurd ideas down everybody's throat, and talking just as if she were a man in disguise. It was the finest fun to hear her and Clavering the other night at the Colonel's, she giving him one of her regular doses on the rights of woman, and Clavering, in his most mellifluous tones, sympathizing and agreeing with her."

"Yes," said Marsh, "and laughing at her in his sleeve the whole time, and trotting her out into the bargain. He does enjoy making a fool of her, and she never sees it, not one bit."

"Sure, I can't abide strong-minded women," said Barry, with his usual delicious brogue; "if the dear creatures only knew how men hate that sort of thing, sure they would think twice before they took up with it."

This conversation gave me some little insight into the characters of a few of the fairer portion of the inhabitants of A——, and that day, when they all assembled to hear the band, I began to make discoveries on my own account.

The Miss Thompsons I found on the ground when

I arrived, surrounded by a bevy of officers, with whom they were maintaining a lively and rattling flow of jokes and repartee, and by whom they were treated in a manner much more free and easy than it would have pleased me to see adopted towards my sisters. I was speedily introduced to both the mamma and the young ladies, and their reception of me was very civil indeed. The Miss Thompsons were, *par excellence*, the garrison hacks of A—, and had officiated in that capacity to a whole string of successive regiments, who had come to the town, and during their residence there had flirted, according to their respective inclinations, with each and all of the fair sisters; had on their departure murmured a graceful—sometimes an affecting—farewell to their lively enslavers, but had at the same time departed as they came, without seeking to dissolve the bond of union that linked the fair and fascinating quartette. Why this should have been so it were really hard to say. They were all pretty, all lively, very unaffected, and very ready to make themselves agreeable to any man disposed to court or receive their civilities.

The mamma was a portly specimen of an English matron, “fat, fair, and rather more than forty,” fifty would be nearer the mark.

She understood her vocation, too, in a manner; dressed well, looked well, and took up the attention of the junior subalterns and detrimentals generally, while the young ladies were, in mess parlance, “pitching into the eligibles.” They gave very pleasant little parties, too, of various styles, and these entertainments appeared to be popular.

I was under the impression for a considerable time

that Mrs. Thompson was a widow, but I afterwards discovered that an appendage to the establishment existed in the shape of a husband and father. New comers generally took him for the butler, as he was rarely visible until the advent of supper, when he was to be seen flitting vaguely about the sideboard, and being bald and stout, and carefully invested in a white choker, the resemblance was painfully striking, and was greatly assisted by his utter absorption in the employment of issuing liquid supplies, and the fact of nobody knowing him and his knowing nobody.

Miss Thompson was decidedly the best of the four sisters ; she had some heart, and a good deal of head : the others had very little of the first, and none at all of the latter.

Eleanor was really a very handsome girl ; dark hair, good teeth, tall graceful figure, skin perhaps a trifle too sallow in the daytime, but then it lighted up so well, and had such a rich creamy tint ; while her eyes were deep and dreamy looking, and you caught yourself thinking about them rather more than once or twice afterwards.

She was a peculiar girl, and under different auspices might have come out a very different character ; but here, in a garrison town, born and brought up among flashy, second-rate people, Eleanor Thompson was a regular thorough-paced garrison flirt, and such she was likely to remain, unless some kind fate removed her from her present influences. I think she often regretted her butterfly existence, and the germs of better qualities could often be traced in her unequal spirits and conversation ; but she had not moral courage to rouse herself and shake off her self-imposed trammels. Habit had become second nature, and all the effect of

her occasional twinges of conscience was that what might have been gay moments were frequently embittered by the knowledge that her conduct was likely to be severely animadverted upon by the very people who were urging her to still further folly ; and even with this very feeling and certainty, she was in no way restrained from the commission of acts at which her own better nature recoiled. She was a strange girl, a most accomplished flirt, and, oddly enough, her heart was engaged in her flirtations, which is not usually the case.

She was quite in love with the object of her affections for the time being ; his step, or the sound of his voice, would bring a shade to her cheek and a flash to her eye, and the room deprived of his presence was to her a desert. Two or three men, I believe, really paid her serious attentions, but for some reason or other they did not suit ; she was the only one of the Thompsons who was at all particular, her sisters would have married anybody, especially if he wore a scarlet coat. Eleanor decidedly wished to be married, but she had some notions of her own on the subject ; and the men who proposed to her did not happen to be the ones she wanted.

But she was not happy unless she had something going on, some flirtation to "keep her hand," in as the 144th termed her style of proceeding. Sometimes the case lasted a considerable time, often it was short, and a mere common acquaintance succeeded a flirtation that had set all A—— talking, only that A—— never wondered at anything the Thompsons did, especially Eleanor.

From all accounts, legion was the only name for her fancies, and each succeeding one was apparently

as sincere as its predecessors, and yet the men were amazingly different; dark, fair; tall, short; lively, morose; sentimental, funny; her disposition must have been surprisingly adaptive, for she really liked them all. When the crisis came, parting—a quarrel—or whatever brought the affair to a termination, Eleanor suffered very much for a time—she really did—and a blank appeared to have been created in her existence.

Some withered flowers, a lock of hair, or some token of by-gone hours, became the cynosure of her eyes, thoughts, memory. She had a whole drawer, and a very large one, quite stuffed with things of the kind, each of which could a tale unfold, some of them rather odd ones too.

Her ideas strongly approached the Italian system of the "*cavaliere servente*." She liked to have a man devoted to her, ready to forestall her wants and wishes, and also to put up with her caprices, of which she had a good many. But he must not be too willing, too devoted, or she soon got tired of him; she liked a little difficulty in matters of this sort, and rather piqued herself on her skill in attracting and retaining men not generally addicted to this style of thing. But when the affair was over, and the man departed, then her spirits gradually improved, till she became quite resigned and almost cheerful. Some nice person started up somewhere, and a few days would see Eleanor despatching tiny epistles on various pretexts; receiving more bulky answers to the same, a few of which took up their permanent abode in the large drawer; arranging carefully selected bouquets or trying over new music, a pair of fierce-looking moustaches usually superintending the operation; while in the evening her dark eyes might be seen glancing

through the interstices of a fan, or over the blossoms of her bouquet, at the said pair of moustaches, the scene of action being a heavily-curtained window-seat or a snug little nook in an only partially visible corner of the staircase.

When Eleanor had nothing particular on hand, or when it rained, and "the day was dark and dreary," then did she retreat to her own apartment, and having first carefully closed the door, she opened that drawer of many tales, and devoted herself to a melancholy meditation over its precious treasures. Alack! and alas! Eleanor was often very downcast at such times, and good cause she had to be so if all people said of her were true: but then I make a point of never believing above a quarter of anything I hear, and I find it a very fair average on the whole.

Gracious me! what a discussion on Eleanor Thompson; but, dear reader, I shall not similarly inflict her sisters upon you, they shall be despatched in a much more summary manner.

Fanny was a jolly little girl, fair and blue-eyed. She had a nice little lisp; it was not bad at all, I rather liked it; and she spouted Tennyson to no end, and sometimes hit it off very neatly too. She was up to everything—rode, swam, hunted, shot, feathered her oar quite equal to the jolly young waterman, and could smoke cigars that made me feel queerish.

She was the very girl to get coupled with at a picnic, you were sure of fun for the day. She stuck at nothing, never minded what people said or thought, and was quite impervious to hints of every description; and if people tried to glance disapprobation, would coolly fear they had got something in their eye, and

ask if she could assist them in any way. With all this she looked as meek and mild as a mouse, was very gentle in her manner, and rather gave strangers the impression that she was shy.

As to Clara and Sophy, they had no very distinguishing characteristics, except that they were pretty and lively—that is to say, they had good digestions both for food and flattery; and in my whole life I do think I never met with girls who talked greater rubbish, nonsense in no degree expresses their quality of conversation.

All this time our band is playing on the green at A——, and gaily dressed ladies, with a proper mixture of gentlemen, are sauntering up and down, listening to the music, and making comments on one another, more especially on the various flirtations supposed to be in progress.

I attach myself more particularly to Eleanor Thompson, and by her I am speedily put quite *au fait* of everything going on.

“Now tell me who everybody is, Miss Thompson; as a new comer I am in a state of profound ignorance, so pray enlighten my darkness.”

“Well, I will; but first is there anybody you want to have pointed out to you. Look here, do you see those two old women coming, the one in green and the other with staring yellow ribbons?”

“Yes,” I replied; “two glorious specimens of the genus old maid I can see without being told. Tales of scandal are gleaming from their eyes.”

“Oh! Mr. Nugent how can you? But you are quite right, they are perfectly awful; sit at home and invent gossip, and discharge it next day on everybody who will listen to them. I feel rather independent of

them now, for it is so long since they carried off every shred of character I ever possessed that they can do me no more harm. Now they only give a horrified look as they pass me, I am quite past being mentioned."

"That must be a comfort," I observed.

"Of course it is; but only think what I have gone through before arriving at this climax. Isn't it odd how people always relish ill-natured stories, swallow them with the greatest avidity, when I am sure they would not care a pin if one did the most virtuous action going, would consider it rather a bore to have to listen to it."

"Human nature, Miss Thompson! but I am sure you are of a totally different order of beings; I can see you in a state of melting interest at the relation of some noble deed, and turning away in disgust when you are just about to hear some sweet little tit-bit of scandal, enough to make one's mouth water by the mere anticipation."

"There now, Mr. Nugent, I won't stand chaff from you so early in the day. I expect you to treat me with immense respect for an age to come. Besides I happen to like a good bit of gossip very much, so when you wish to get particularly into my good graces, bring me something piquant."

"Then as I shall always wish to be in that position, I shall of course invent when I have nothing ready, but it's all one I suppose."

"Do nothing of the kind; if you are at a loss, go and call on the Miss Greens, you will not come away empty, their fount of scandal is always full."

"I shall make a point of getting an early introduction. I hope they give tea-fights, with hot muffins,

and seed-cake, and all that sort of thing. I think such a party is the best fun going."

"Well, if you are really partial to tea-fights as you elegantly call them, I will give you an invitation to one to-night. We have a small specimen at home this evening, and if you will come I will go and order muffins on my way home."

"Come! of course I will. But when the band is over we will go and get the muffins together. I am very fond of shopping with ladies, and hints of the kind may be valuable to me some day."

"I declare I never met with such a boy, for you know you are nothing else. Where did you pick up such an amazing amount of assurance?"

"Miss Thompson, you astound me. I am painfully shy, and feel that my bashfulness will mar my fortune in life."

"I am sure it will. I wonder if Captain Bell admired your modest diffidence the day you sent him the mutton at mess. I hate Captain Bell, and I loved you from that minute."

"Why how on earth did you hear that?" I inquired.

"Oh! we hear everything just as if it were said and done on the housetops. Wait till you know A—— a little better, and you will find that your very thoughts are known."

"Who can tell you?"

"Ah! that I keep to myself, but I know everything I wish. Now here is an A—— celebrity coming, Miss Wylde."

"Oh! I wish to see her. Good gracious, what a steuple!"

"Pretty well, certainly. She is quite a character, and says and does the most extraordinary things. She is what they call strong minded."

"From the way you say it one would fancy it synonymous with a leper."

"I declare, Mr. Nugent, what things you say. I shan't introduce you now, because you will meet her this evening."

"Well, there is another person I wish to see—Miss Vane."

"She is not to be here to-day, she joined a riding party in the country, but she is to be with us too."

"Miss Vane, Miss Wylde, and muffins, quite too much for any mere mortal in one evening. Don't you think the music must be nearly over now, I want our shopping to begin."

"It can't last much longer, but how shamefully we have behaved, such a lovely programme, and we have not listened to one air. And your band is such a capital one too."

"I can't express an opinion on the subject, for, as you say, I have not heard a note; but I consider I have been much more agreeably employed."

"Oh! of course you must say that. I wonder why people think they must always utter set speeches."

"Far from it, Miss Thompson, it is the expression of my genuine sentiments."

"There now—that will do, and there is 'God save the Queen,' we will go and see about the muffins."

CHAPTER IX.

THE THOMPSON'S TEA-FIGHT.

"BY Jove! it's nine o'clock! Who's for the Thompsons?" said Captain Lacy.

"Clavering's going," said Barry; "I heard Fanny ask him just after she did me, so I shan't stir one step."

"He's dining out," said Lacy, "so perhaps he may not go after all."

"Yes he will," said De Vere. "Lucile Vane is going, and I think the Major is getting touched in that quarter. He and I rode with the Jennings girls to-day, and Lucile Vane was there too, and if ever I saw the old major looking spooney, it was then, bending forward on his horse, and looking up right under her wideawake."

"Well, Barry, then the coast will be clear."

"If I thought there would be any fun of that kind, sure I'd go just to see how Fanny will look under the circumstances. Of course you have an invite, Nugent. Eleanor and you were going it like blazes to-day. Fast running even for the Thompsons."

"I'm going," I replied.

"Take care, mee boy," said Barry, "though you are but a young one, sure it's all fish that come to the Thompsons' net."

We then separated to discard our mess toilettes, and a quarter of an hour later found us in the Thompsons' drawing-room.

From fifteen to twenty people were there assembled, and Eleanor Thompson was dispensing tea at a small table in one corner, being assisted in her graceful labours by the present *objet aimé*, a tall good looking captain of artillery, stationed in A—— for recruiting purposes.

He found the Thompsons' house a very pleasant lounge for his idle hours, of which he had a good many; and discovering that the free run of the establishment, and perpetual invitations of every form and shape were to be obtained at no greater cost than that of devoting himself pretty extensively to the fair Eleanor, riding out with her, and sending her occasional bouquets and French bonbons, he was not slow in availing himself of the privilege. She looked very nice, indeed, in a white muslin with scarlet geraniums in her dark hair, and Captain Haultain was extremely assiduous in his attentions, which appeared to be perfectly understood by everybody. I approached the tea-table notwithstanding, and preferred a request for a cup of tea.

"Lots of sugar and cream, Miss Thompson, and I hope you have been keeping the muffins warm."

"I am sure there is not a morsel left, Mr. Nugent, and you don't deserve it, coming so late. Did not I tell you a small early party?"

"I know you did, Miss Thompson, and I came the instant mess was over; but don't say the muffins are all gone, when I have been nursing my appetite till now, intending to eat about a dozen on my own hook."

She laughed and said, "I don't think you two know each other. 'Captain Haultain,' 'Mr. Nugent,' and now speak about something while I ring and have the things cleared away; we must have some music and then dance."

The artillery officer and I exchanged a few observations on general topics. He was rather conceited, I thought, but undeniably handsome, and the women all fussed tremendously about his looks, so it was not surprising that he rather piqued himself upon them.

Presently Colonel and Mrs. Grant were announced. I had not yet seen the colonel's wife, as she had been absent from A—— for several days, and I rather wished to see her, as I heard she was young and pretty.

She was a very little creature, apparently not more than one or two-and-twenty, and looked more like the stately colonel's daughter than his wife. A pretty little round figure, and a sweet merry face with large blue eyes and clustering curls, her ways and manner almost childlike, and such a happy, gay laugh, it did one's heart good to hear it.

Colonel Grant spoke to me very kindly, and introduced me to his wife, who smiled and held out her tiny hand, hoping that I liked the 144th. I praised it till she was quite charmed, she said, and was sure I should get on famously, and be a credit to her pet regiment.

Some one now opened the piano, and two of the Miss Thompsons sang a pretty duet very nicely indeed; then came a few songs from other people, and then the room was cleared for dancing.

Just at this moment the door was opened, and an old lady, leaning on the arm of an old gentleman

appeared in view ; behind them came a young lady, and in the rear towered the imposing figure of Major Clavering.

"How late you are," chorussed the four Miss Thompsons.

"Why, Lucile," said Eleanor, "I thought you were not to dine at the Grays."

"They only asked me to-day to fill a vacancy, so I went to oblige them. Generally, they never have young people, and I thought it a penance going, but did not like to be stiff. However, to-day it was not *quite* so bad," and she glanced laughingly at Major Clavering, who responded with a look that would have extinguished all Fanny Thompson's hopes had she seen it.

At first sight I was decidedly disappointed in Miss Vane.

She was not at all pretty, very far from it, and yet there was something about her both peculiar and interesting. Her only really good feature was her eyes, and they were very fine, and redeemed her face from being positively ugly. Her nose was slightly coarse, and of no order worth mentioning ; her lips were inclined to be thick, but she had capital teeth, even and white as ivory. She had not even a good skin, though it looked better at night than in the day time.

To counterbalance all this, her feet and hands were models for a sculptor, and her figure perfectly exquisite ; her head was small and gracefully shaped, and she had quantities of beautiful black hair always charmingly arranged, while I never, before or since, met with any woman who dressed so well, and knew so exactly what was most becoming to her.

On this particular evening she wore a tunic of rose-coloured gauze over a white dress, looped up with green velvet leaves mixed with large pearls, and a wreath of the same in her hair. It was most stylishly made, and became her exceedingly. In her hand she carried a splendid bouquet; and a beautiful spray of white heath that decorated the button-hole of Major Clavering's coat had a very suspicious resemblance to some still in Miss Vane's possession. She was undeniably a very striking looking girl, and without a particle of good looks, contrived to be more admired than many who were extremely pretty.

Evidence of this was soon afforded me by the sensation her arrival created, and the various claims preferred for her hand in the approaching dances.

"I'm going to dance this quadrille with Major Clavering, and then I have not made up my mind what I shall do next. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Besides, you know, Captain Lacy, I never do waltz with you, you can't do it in the least. We'll have a nice sensible conversation next quadrille, that is your forte."

Nobody seemed to be offended at anything Miss Vane said, so Captain Lacy smiled, and acquiesced in her decision respecting the sensible quadrille.

"Where is Mr. De Vere?" asked Miss Vane, suddenly. "I hear he has invented a new perfume that he won't divulge to a soul, and I must have some immediately."

"He's settling his ambrosial locks at the glass in the boudoir," said Captain Marsh.

"Do be more moderate in your expressions, Captain Marsh," exclaimed Miss Vane, with a laugh. "My education has been excessively neglected, and

I never can get much beyond two syllables, three at the very outside. There should be a law passed fining people who use long words."

"That would soon ruin Marsh, he has a taste that way," said Captain Lacy.

"By the by you have a new ensign," said Miss Vane, "what is he like?"

"Come here and be trotted out, Nugent; he's dying to know you, Miss Vane."

"That of course," replied the young lady. "Nice descriptions you have given him of us all, I'll be bound. Have they not, Mr. Nugent? Tell the truth now."

"I hear you dance very charmingly, Miss Vane; may I hope for a fast dance with you? But I won't have anything to do with sensible quadrilles."

"Then I presume your forte lies in your heels, not in your head like Captain Lacy?"

"That you must find out, Miss Vane. I won't even hint at my talents being equally distributed. But you have not granted my request."

"No; I must see you victimize somebody else first. I am very particular who I dance with. If I approve, you shall have the second waltz."

She took the arm of Major Clavering as she spoke, and joined the dancers, while I looked after her and meditated on the very queer girl that she was. What her peculiar charm was I really cannot say, but there was the *je ne sais quoi* about her that French women often have, but very few English.

Her eyes were very attractive—I never saw such speaking ones—and in looking at you they seemed to read your very thoughts as they came into your mind. If all that people say about magnetic attraction be

truth, I am sure Miss Vane would have been a first-rate mesmeriser. There was certainly some extraordinary power of attraction in those eyes of hers, for no one seemed able to resist them, and any one on whom her quiet, speaking glance, fell, was very shortly after by her side, let his occupation at the time be what it would.

She was very unlike the worthy old couple that owned her—one could almost fancy she had been changed at nurse.

Mr. Vane was termed “an excellent old boy” by the irreverent youngsters of the 144th. He was a genuine specimen of the regular old English heavy father, stood with his back to the fire-place, his legs a little apart, and his coat-tails slightly elevated, benignly fumbling with his watch-chain, and watching Lucile, perfectly happy if she were so. He had a cheery, frosty old countenance, inclined to be corpulent, and wore gold-mounted spectacles.

His wife was very much the same kind of individual, except that she occupied a cosy arm-chair in lieu of a *pose* in front of the fire, and instead of playing with her chain and seals, she knitted. What a prodigious quantity of stockings that old lady must have perpetrated in the course of her worthy old life! the click click of her wires is ever present to my ears when I recall the image of dear, excellent Mrs. Vane. Who wore them it were useless to imagine. I know she did not, for she was a button of a little woman, and her labours were usually of Herculean dimensions. It was not Mr. Vane, for the old boy had a very good leg and neat foot, and when in *grande tenue*, he always sported a pair of knee-breeches, and the finest of black silk stockings, for he was rather vain of his

well-preserved leg ; and it had descended in even greater perfection to Lucile, who had a foot and ankle that an Andalusian might have envied.

She knew it well, too, and kilted herself (as she called it) in famous style on wet days, or in crossing a muddy spot.

“What do I care what people say?”—such was her commentary on the subject—“I know I’ve got a good foot, and I don’t mind others knowing it too. They may abuse me as much as they like, it’s all spite ;” which indeed it very probably was.

The quadrille terminated, and then Miss Vane was claimed by Mr. Splashton for the first waltz, while I was favoured with the hand of Miss Clara Thompson, who had a neat little light figure, and spun round famously.

On its conclusion, I approached Miss Vane, and begged to know if I were to be condemned to sensible conversation with her, or whether I might solicit the next waltz.

“Yes,” she replied coolly ; “you’ll do, you have a very good style, and make your partner look well, which is a very valuable accomplishment.”

I was absolutely going to bring out something about certain people not needing that assistance, something awfully commonplace in short ; but before I had framed the idea into words, Miss Vane held up her finger in a warning manner.

“Now don’t, Mr. Nugent. I never can stand a *bêtise* of that sort. To think that anything so young and ingenuous as you ought to be, can stand there and look me in the face, and without a shadow of a blush, begin to get up stale compliments.”

“Really, Miss Vane,” I began, but she laughingly

interrupted me, "Don't make excuses; it was bad enough, but leave it there. Besides, Mr. Nugent, take it as a rule that women really do not value compliments so much as they are supposed to do. Sometimes they are passable enough; but there are just two men in your regiment from whom I ever allow them—Major Clavering, because he says them in the style of a Spanish grandee, and in a patronizing manner that is quite enchanting; and little Mr. Gordon, because I am extremely fond of the child, and like to encourage him in talking nonsense."

"I wish you would look on me in the same light, Miss Vane. I'll talk any amount of nonsense you wish, and you told me I was very young."

"Oh, no! there is but one Mr. Gordon; he is a rose unique of his kind, and no one shall supplant him in my affections. His simplicity and excellence are the most delicious things I know; and the way he says, 'Oh! Miss Vane!' when I startle him out of his propriety, is worth any money to hear."

"Lucky little Geordie!" exclaimed Splashton, for half a dozen of us were clustered round this odd girl, and she had remarks for us all, and let down one and took up another just as it suited her fancy.

The gallant major was at this moment dispensing a little of the radiance of his presence on Fanny Thompson, who was in a fluttering state of smiles and blushes, and looking extremely pleased. Though Major Clavering was certainly doing the attentive to Miss Vane, he was far too much a man of the world to allow Fanny to feel herself neglected, and she had no occasion to wear the willow on this particular evening, so that Mr. Barry did not exactly have the satisfaction he anticipated.

His old flame, Miss Wylde, was also present, and, by the by, I have neglected to describe her.

She was not my style at all, and I conceived a strong aversion to her from the first ; but, as all the 144th said she was " great fun," there may have been something about her more attractive than I ever could discover.

She was far past her "*première jeunesse*," and would indeed have been a credit to the Grenadier Company, being a tall strapping woman, with a loud impudent voice and manner, and she had the most perfect disregard of all the forms and usages of society, so much so that at times one was inclined to forget she was a woman at all.

As a rule, ladies may generally take it for granted that setting up for the reputation of being an oddity is a mistake ; men don't like women of this stamp, they are afraid of them, especially when, as was the case with Miss Wylde, they have a bitter and unrestrained tongue in addition ; and this natural dread of a woman, who frees herself from the weaknesses of her sex, and yet retains its immunities, is generally converted into a feeling of dislike and contempt.

Miss Vane was singular, but only pleasantly so, and she was never ill-natured, a little laughing satire was the utmost she ever indulged in ; and people will pardon much in a young, lively, and attractive girl, especially when she is also an heiress, and her parents give good dinners and are liberal in their invitations.

Still Miss Wylde had no lack of attention in public ; for men will be amused, and are highly indifferent as to the quality of their entertainment so long as plenty is forthcoming.

She had been very handsome, too, though her good

looks were now on the wane ; staring black eyes and long showy black ringlets, with a brilliant complexion, not guiltless of a touch of rouge, made her even yet by candlelight a bold, flashy-looking woman, with a certain amount of beauty. I should not have liked her to be a friend of wife or sister of mine ; but yet, according to the verdict of the 144th, she was "great fun," and she did not seem to have an idea that she was held in other than general estimation.

Could Miss Wylde have heard the free comments made on her by her military admirers when her back was turned, and they gave free vent to their sentiments, it is possible that she might have been slightly amazed ; but, according to a favourite maxim of Mr. Barry's—

"Sure don't we all live by abusing each other, and what's the odds so long as we are happy !"

In due time came my waltz with the fair Lucile, and I may say, without vanity, that Miss Vane had no cause to be ashamed of her partner, for I could dance if I could do nothing else. Few pleasures equal that of a waltz with a good partner, smooth floor, and good music, and on this occasion all were united.

Two of the Miss Thompsons were playing the "Summer Flowers" to perfection ; they always had a linen on the floor, stretched like a drum head, and Lucile Vane and I swam round in perfect time and unison of movement.

How delicious it was ! I never really knew what dancing was before, having never encountered such an exquisite partner. We went at it again and again, my hand lightly clasping her slender waist, her white gloved fingers just resting on my shoulder, a faint perfume of violets from Lucile's floating hair, a dreamy

languor surrounding me like a halo, the very acme of enjoyment.

"Oh dear ! how nice !" she said, as I led her to a chair on the conclusion of the dance, and taking her large feather fan began to work it most assiduously. "I am convinced you are a goose, Mr. Nugent, you dance far too well to have a particle of sense."

"Then we are a pair, Miss Vane, for I never met your equal."

"Oh ! I forgot that view of the subject, so must retract and apologise."

"Pray don't ; I shall be anything you like to think me."

"Beware !" she replied, with a saucy laugh, "I hate civil speeches, unless they are uncommonly original, and none of yours have been so yet."

"Shall I try the effect of a little incivility, Miss Vane ? by way of variety it may be pleasing."

"Do so as soon as you like, but remember that two can play at that game, and that I have a very unbridled tongue when I once begin."

"Well then, I won't, for I am afraid of you ; besides I don't much like being chaffed by ladies."

"Why so ?"

"Just a fancy of mine ; it's all very well for a man to be cheeky, but I hate a cheeky woman ; I heard Miss Wylde going it strongly with Marsh during the quadrille, and she really made me sick."

"Don't abuse her, she is a very particular friend of mine."

"I am sure she is not, for she was pulling you to pieces in fine style."

"Was she ? the wretch ! Well, but all one's best friends do that constantly. One half the world would

be at daggers drawn with the other, if they only heard their greatest intimates discussing them."

"Then I hate people of that sort. I am sure you are not like that Miss Vane."

"Oh! yes I am, not a speck worse or better than my neighbours. I enjoy very much pulling people to pieces. Who shall we begin with? There's that horrid Captain Haultain, I can't abide him, we'll discuss him *con amore*."

"I know too little about him, only I see that he is handsome, and I hear that he is a regular lady killer."

"Don't use that word again, it is my particular aversion—an insult to women of common sense. Do you suppose we are all fascinated by moustaches like black rat's tails, and teeth grinning from ear to ear?"

"I don't say all; but he has evidently achieved a conquest in this family."

"*Pour passer le temps*' on both sides."

"Is not that rather a funny style of proceeding?"

"They seem to like it, but I tell Eleanor she will burn her fingers some day. She is the only one of the family worth anything, and I am rather sorry that she makes such a goose of herself."

Certainly Miss Eleanor and her cavalier seemed to be enjoying themselves uncommonly. We were sitting opposite the open door, and had a full view of their proceedings. They were leaning over the banisters of the stair-case, and Captain Haultain seemed to be petitioning for a flower from her bouquet, which she was coquettishly refusing. She held her hand high above her head, and a white camellia appeared to be the coveted prize; but the playful struggle was of short continuance, Captain Haultain possessed himself of the uplifted hand, which he pressed tenderly to

his lips, and the white camellia was triumphantly placed in his coat.

Miss Vane and I looked at each other and laughed.

"Did you ever see such a couple of ninnies?" she exclaimed; "if they would only have the sense to close the door when they are going to enact private theatricals of that kind."

"I think Mrs. Thompson would be justified in asking his intentions if she had been sitting where we are," I replied.

"And he would say that he had none, and Eleanor would go into hysterics, and then look out for another *attaché*."

The couple under discussion entered the room as we spoke; Eleanor had a slight flush on her usually pale cheek, Captain Haultain looked quite cool, and had rather an amused expression. I could not help fancying that if his thoughts could have been laid bare at that moment, Miss Eleanor Thompson would scarcely have been gratified with the inspection.

There was a good deal more dancing, and then a light supper was laid out in one corner of the room.

Just before attacking it, we danced a cotillion, which afforded a wide scope for flirtation on the part of the Misses Thompson.

In particular I could not help being struck with the regularity with which Captain Haultain and Eleanor Thompson contrived to select each other in the figure where a number disappear behind a curtain, and only fingers are displayed; other people got those they did not care about, and my unfortunate pull produced Miss Wylde as my partner; but the gallant artilleryman and the fair Eleanor never made any such mis-

takes. For sometime I could not detect their mode of signal, but I hit on it at last. The one in hiding pulled their glove considerably beyond the extended finger, and then doubled it down, so that no possibility of error could arise.

I give this hint for the benefit of parties similarly situated, indeed I have frequently since acted upon it myself. At the close of the evening, I told Miss Thompson with great sincerity that I had enjoyed her tea-fight very much, and trusted she would include me in all future invitations. There was a great cloaking and shawling of the various ladies, and I saw Major Clavering devoting himself with much *empressement* to Miss Vane. He handed her to her carriage, and when he returned, I saw he had retained her bouquet, though it was immediately and carefully concealed in the folds of his military cloak.

"Making fast running," was my inward comment.

We lit our cigars in the hall before setting out for the barracks, and as we stood at the door exchanging farewells, Captain Haultain, who was settling himself into his topcoat, withdrew a flower from his button-hole, and twirling it carelessly in his fingers for a few moments, he gave a low sneering laugh, and sent it spinning into the road.

No one probably observed the action but myself, nor would have guessed its import if they had ; but I remembered the scene on the staircase, when he had abstracted that same white camellia that now lay unheeded on the ground, and I thought that if Eleanor Thompson had seen what I had just witnessed, she would probably have had a heartache at night and a headache on the morrow.

CHAPTER X.

LIFE IN BARRACKS.

I HAVE omitted to mention that I was duly invited to the Vanes' dance, which was expected to be a good affair, and to which all the visiting men of the regiment had been asked. Percy Lascelles went to none of those things, indeed he was scarcely ever out, and looked on society generally as a bore.

"Vastly civil of the people to ask me, Charley," was his reply when I inquired the reason of his total abstinence in this particular; "but they don't care for me, and I care still less for them, so what is the use of putting oneself out of the way for them? I enjoy a good talk with you over a pipe far more than all their rubbish of fashionable entertainments."

Though I confess to a strong liking for a good party, and hold it to be a very agreeable mode of passing an evening, still I also found a great charm in the long confabulations Percy and I used to hold when mess was over, and we had adjourned to one or other of our rooms for the purpose of smoking a weed, and at the same time exchanging our ideas on various topics. Often we were silent for a long time; when Percy was in one of his moody reveries, I never plagued him in any way, but sat watching the smoke

curling round the room, only sometimes I wondered what he was thinking about so earnestly.

I could frequently see that his reflections were not of a lively description, for he would knit his brows in a manner that told how fierce a temper lay smouldering within the usually calm exterior, and the dark look would come into his eyes which made me think that those who loved Percy Lascelles might now and then have cause for sorrow. Sometimes a half-uttered ejaculation would escape him, and he would dash the ashes violently from his cigar, while a smile, half sorrowful, half sneering, would light up his features into what was almost diabolical beauty, and a moment after he would be himself again, calm and indifferent.

To me he was ever the same—kind and considerate; and if on any occasion a hasty word escaped him, the next instant his hand was on my shoulder: “Charley, my boy, you don’t mind me, it’s only my horrid, quick temper—you know I would not say a thing to annoy you.”

Well did I know it, and day after day saw the growth of our friendship, and the increase of mutual confidence between us. He was captain of my company, and to him I was indebted for many useful hints as well as warnings that kept me out of scrapes and mischief.

They were a wild set of youngsters in the 144th, and many a row did they get into: none, however, productive of serious consequences.

Without stretching his authority too tightly, Colonel Grant held the reins of government with judicious firmness, and was both feared, respected, and at the same time liked by every officer and private in the regiment.

He never objected to harmless amusement of any kind, and was indeed a most pattern colonel, sensible, and yet very warm-hearted.

His dear little wife was a favourite with every one, and she also, though so youthful and inexperienced, fulfilled the duties of her position well and faithfully.

Many a comfortable word of hope and sympathy was spoken by pretty Mrs. Grant, her sweet face bent over many a sick bed, her gentle voice cheered many a sufferer. She interested herself in the establishment of clothing clubs for the soldiers' wives, and had schools for the training of their children, and a tale of woe or misfortune was never brought to her in vain.

In much she reminded me of Lady Lyle; they might have been sisters in disposition at least.

Major Thompson, also, was too like her in tastes and character to be otherwise than popular with Mrs. Grant.

"I do so love that good old major," she would say with warmth; "it is lucky that I am a married woman, or I should most certainly lose my heart to him."

Major Thompson was not so old either, but then little Mrs. Grant was barely twenty-one.

From the first she and I were very good friends. I called there a day or two after my introduction, and had quite a long gossip with her. She asked me all about my family, how many sisters I had, and which was my favourite; and I told her about how I got my commission, and how I thought her so like Lady Lyle.

"And she so pretty and charming! Fie! for shame! Mr. Nugent, to try and flatter me so shockingly; and Colonel Grant tells me I am quite spoiled already."

"I am sure he must spoil you more than any one,

Mrs. Grant," I replied, "for I know you can do anything with him."

"Indeed, you are right," she said, warmly. "He is the best and kindest of husbands, and never refused me anything in his life."

She asked me about Percy, too, and said she had often pitied his isolated condition, and felt what a comfort a friend would be to him.

"Poor Captain Lascelles," she said, "I am sure he has had a sore trial some time or other during his life, he is so reserved and melancholy; but he seems to have taken quite a fancy to you; I hear you are inseparable."

"I have found him very kind," I replied, "and have a strong regard for him."

"You are so different from him," she remarked. "Don't be offended, Mr. Nugent, but it quite reminds one of the fable of the lion and the mouse. Proud, haughty Captain Lascelles, and you only the last ensign you know."

"But I don't find him proud or haughty, Mrs. Grant; he is very much the contrary."

"Oh! I know," she replied, "he can be very agreeable when he chooses. I think nearly the only place he ever goes to is our house, and sometimes, when we are alone or just one or two others, he is so frank and pleasant, that I can scarcely believe he is the same Captain Lascelles who at another time will stand with his arms folded and a contemptuous look on his face that makes me feel quite afraid of him."

"I know he enjoys a quiet party best; he has told me that you have been very kind to him, and that he has spent very pleasant evenings at your house."

"Well, I am sure he may do so as often as he likes; both the colonel and I would like very much that he should regard us as friends. You and he must come here some night soon, Mr. Nugent, and between us we'll try and tame the savage, and see if we cannot make him sociable at last."

The very next day Colonel Grant spoke to Captain Lascelles and myself after parade, and asked us to dine with him and his wife—no party, only themselves.

We both accepted, and Percy said, as we returned to our rooms, "I like well enough going to the Grants; she is a good little woman, and I do believe has some heart in her composition. Between her and you, Charley, the world is not totally bad."

"Oh, Percy!" I exclaimed, "I know such lots of nice people."

"Do you really, Charley? Then you beat me hollow," he replied, in a satirical manner. "I never met many at the best of times, and it strikes me the breed is becoming more scarce than ever."

"Well, I don't know, Percy," I said, "but I think some of the A—— people are not bad at all."

"Lucky for you that you can think so," he rejoined; "but youth sees everything *couleur de rose*. Long may the delusion last, Charley, my boy, for certainly in this case, 'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.' When you are a grizzly old sinner like me you will sing another tune."

"I wonder at you, Percy, when you know there is not a man in the regiment like you for good looks, or anything else. And you might be so popular, too, if you would only be decently civil."

"Who has been putting all this bosh into your

foolish little noddle?" he replied. "Do you think everybody sees me with your eyes, you little goose?"

"I know what you really are, Percy; you are not yourself to other people, and they misjudge you."

"I have no ambition to be a popular character," he replied. "It never was my forte; I am much too lazy; and, besides, I don't care a rush for people's opinion of me."

"Then if you don't, I do; and I wish you would do yourself justice, you are so different to me."

"I like you, my little Mentor, and I have a regard for one or two other people, and may wish to have it reciprocated; but as to the good folks of A——, they are welcome to abuse me to their hearts' content."

"I think you are very hard to please, Percy. I am sure some of them are well enough, as times go."

"As, for instance, that flirt, Eleanor Thompson, or any of that estimable family—silly, dressy, manœvering girls, whose whole aim in life is to entrap some wretched man into marrying them! Charley, raise your standard of womankind, for there are better specimens to be found than such as they are. A parcel of raw boys may find amusement in dangling after them for a time, but no man of sense would ever give them a thought."

"Eleanor is better than the others," I observed.

"I don't know that she is. There is a kind of mawkish sentimental assumption about her, that almost provokes me more than the folly of her sisters. They are simpletons, and act up to their character; but she has a glimmering of better things, and only employs it to unworthy ends."

"You are terribly severe," I said. "I think the worst that can be said of the Thompsons is, that they

are great flirts, and nobody's enemies but their own."

"There again you are quite wrong, Charley. Such women do a very great deal of mischief: they lower the sex generally in the eyes of well disposed men, and lead many to suppose that all women are alike in reality, only circumstances may have a restraining effect. I declare I have seen both Eleanor and Fanny Thompson behaving in a way, that if they had been sisters of mine, I should never have spoken to them again. I have despised women for days after seeing Eleanor trying her sentimental platitudes on some new hand. She is pretty well matched at present, I think," he added, with a sneering laugh; "Haultain is well up to all the moves of the game."

"Do you think she likes him?"

"Likes him! how can I tell? But I hope not, for her own sake. He is a slippery customer. However, it won't be her first defeat by many a one. Charley, would you like to hear your sisters made the laughing-stock of a mess-table, the subject of insulting bets between half a dozen sneering men? I have heard them comparing notes about Eleanor Thompson, repeating her sentimental speeches, commenting on her looks and actions with respect to each other, till, much as I despise them all, I felt sorry for the girl, though a woman of that kind is to me abhorrent beyond all description. Compare them now with that good, innocent, little Mrs. Grant; there is a true, pure-minded woman, whom all must respect. Just watch the manner of men to her and to the Thompsons; you will soon see the different estimation in which they are held."

This long tirade of Percy's was delivered at intervals as we resumed our mufti after the parade.

By the by, a horrid new regulation was daily expected, insisting on undress uniform being constantly worn in the daytime. There was a general outcry against it, as all disliked the restraint. "Sure," said Mr. Barry, "they'll know us by headmark everywhere, and we'll have all the old farmers in the country down on us for kissing their daughters and riding over their fences."

One very important regimental character has not yet been introduced to the reader—Mrs. Brown, or as she was more generally called Mother B——, the mess-woman of the 144th. A man usually occupies this position, but in our case the duties were performed by a woman, and very ably were they fulfilled too.

She was the very biggest woman I ever saw out of a caravan; immensely tall and hugely stout; Irish, and rejoicing in as fine a brogue as "mee boy Barry," which was her style of designating that jovial son of Erin.

Everybody liked her, and she had been many years attached to the regiment, and doubtless had had her own share of pickings from it.

She kept a kind of half store, half shop, which was a very favourite rendezvous with the junior officers, who would perch themselves in uncomfortable attitudes on her tables and chests of drawers, and smoke cigars purchased from the worthy old lady (who kept excellent tobacco, and did not charge much more than double price for it), and during the progress of the weed they would amuse themselves in discussing all that was going on, and in chaffing Mother B——, who had a power of tongue that easily enabled her to keep

her own side of the house, but who permitted great license to "her boys" in everything except where the honour and glory of Ireland were concerned. "Her boys" were greatly in the habit of tormenting her on this particular subject, and got many a "rise" out of the worthy woman.

"Bad luck to ye all for a set of ill-mannered spalpeens, to set on a dacent woman in this way. Sure it 'ud try the temper of Job himself to have to do wid ye."

"What is a spalpeen, Mrs. Brown?" Splashton would inquire with an innocent air. "Some of your wicked Irish words I know; they all end in 'een.' Really Mrs. B—— you are getting quite into a habit of swearing. I'll have to report you."

"Och! and give me the patience to bear wid ye. Is it a spalpeen that's puzzling ye? Sure an' it need'nt, Mr. Splashton, for no finer spicimen is to be found than just your very own self."

"Then it's something uncommonly nice, no doubt of that. Look here, mother B——, get me a glass of that stuff out of the green bottle, and I'll call you 'honey' and 'mavourneen;' that's about the right thing I think."

"Och! ye beguiling young deceaver, is it trying to get round me ye are? Sure Nora Brown has been called 'honey' and 'mavourneen' too often in the ould times to be minding it now. There's some of the green bottle for ye, and see ye don't be after running down the ould country again."

"I never can do that, mother B——, when it produced you. Sure you must have been a regular purty girl in those said ould times," and Splashton tried a touch of the brogue.

"'Deed an' ye may say so ; there was many an uglier girl going than Nora, though ye wouldn't, may be, think it now. When I married Mike Brown that's in his grave these thirteen years come February, honest man, I was a slim colleen enough, and could span my waist wid me own two hands."

"And now it's quite a good constitutional walking round you. Soldiering has agreed with you, Mrs. B——."

"Sure an' it's not for me to complain of it ; I have always had the bite and the sup for me and mine, and if ye'd only be aisy and peaceable boys, I'll stick to the ould 144th as long as I'm able."

"If we were all aisy and peaceable it would not be good for you, Mrs. Brown ; you'd get far too fat and jolly. I must bother you now and then from motives of affectionate interest, and just to keep you in health."

"Go away wid yer nonsense, and I'll take the interest without the bother. My health is very good, Mr. Splashton, and doesn't want no such remedies."

"Ah ! Mrs. B——, I know what is best for you, take my word."

"Sure when ye don't know what is best for yourself, it can't be looked for that you can guide other people. To be fancying yourself on the sick list, and you wid a colour like a rose, and smacking your lips after your glass out of the green bottle."

"Sure that was very fine, Mrs. B——. Don't ye think, mavourneen, that there is another glass to the fore?" and Splashton tried to look very insinuating.

"Divil a drop more for any one, and now go along wid ye all like good boys, or it's but a poor dinner ye'll be getting."

"Give us curried lobster to-day, Mrs. B——, it was famous last time."

"And I want a lovely devil at night; look me out some stunning bones."

"Well, be off wid ye all, or there'll neither be bones nor lobsters for any of ye."

Mrs. B—— was a capital caterer, and no mess in the service was conducted on a better footing than ours; everything was comfortable and well cooked, and such jolly little suppers the old woman would send us up, especially if a little soothing flattery had been judiciously administered beforehand.

For the "Irish Brigade" she would make extra exertions, and Barry, who was her prime favourite, could twist Mother B—— round his finger.

She had supplies of nearly everything we were likely to want, and as they were the best that could be procured, we generally ordered most articles from her, paying well for the same; only I must do Mother B—— the justice to say that she was not troublesome with her "little bills." They were usually pretty big ones when they did make their appearance. If you paid her at once, well and good; but if money was scarce, as it frequently is with ensigns as with many of their betters, she did not resort to dunning, but waited patiently enough for better times, and Mrs. B—— was no loser in the end. She had her faults, and was a far remove from perfection, but she was a very kind, warm-hearted woman, and every living soul in the regiment liked and teased Mother Brown.

We dined at Colonel Grant's, Percy and I, and found no strangers there but ourselves. The colonel was very kind and friendly, and Mrs. Grant, the model of a pretty little hostess, graceful and smiling, and fasci-

nating us both with her sweet, winning manner. It was easy to see that she was the very apple of his eye to her husband; and they did indeed seem a most perfectly united couple.

We sat but a short time after Mrs. Grant left us, and very soon rejoined her in the drawing-room, where she made tea at a small table covered with a white cloth, and employed Percy in filling the teapot, cutting bread and butter, and other little services, to all of which he looked very strange and unaccustomed, but yet performed them with a smile of amusement that lit up his handsome features, and made him look quite happy and contented. Then we had music, sweet simple ballads from Mrs. Grant, that were favourites of her husband's, and spoke of the genuine sentiments of the heart, and made you think of home and far-away scenes and persons. And they made me sing too, and Percy said I had "a capital pipe," and little Mrs. Grant said it was delightful; and when we were lamenting the want of a third voice to accomplish a particular glee, the spirit moved Percy Lascelles, and he placed the music before Mrs. Grant and himself behind her, and took the part with the richest, most mellow voice you could imagine.

Little Mrs. Grant was in raptures, and I said, "Oh! Percy, you never told me you could sing like this," and Percy smiled and made light of it, and seemed half ashamed of having done it at all. But we would not let him off in this manner, and Percy was never disobliging, so he turned over some music books and found a song or two that he knew; and what a magnificent voice he had, with now and then tones of touching pathos that none ever have unless the hand of sorrow has been heavily laid on them.

It was a very pleasant evening, quiet and sociable ; and as Percy and I lighted our cigars and strolled home in the calm silent moonlight, we both sung the praises of the couple we had left ; and agreed that the nearest approach to perfect felicity is the quiet domestic home circle, where a loving and gentle woman is the ministering angel.

Percy did not go to the Vanes, but I did ; and a very capital party it was—a regular dance. I called in the afternoon about a commission with which the young lady had entrusted me, and found the house all in a mess, and a horrid noise of hammering and knocking going on in every direction. I was told Miss Vane wished to see me, so I marched upstairs, and entering the drawing-room, found it perfectly denuded of furniture, and Lucile engaged in watching the labours of two men who were nailing down a linen floorcloth.

The men tugged and strained, and just as they were going to nail it down Miss Vane would work up a wrinkle with her tiny foot, and then she made them go all over it again.

“This is my peculiar department,” she said, “and the only one I trouble myself much about. A good floor is half the battle at a ball, and I am resolved it shall be like a drum head before we leave off.”

She whirled round in a *deux temps* as she spoke, in which I instantly joined her, and much amazed the unhappy men looked as they watched our rapid evolutions, and the numberless creases thereby produced.

At last the cloth was nailed to our satisfaction.

“That’s all right,” said Miss Vane, “and now we’ll go and have some lunch ; I am frightfully hungry.

Floor, music, and lots of men ; get those all good, and a ball is sure to go off well."

I ventured to suggest that lots of men might make it very pleasant for the ladies, but not just so much so for the gentlemen.

"What a deal you have to learn yet, Mr. Nugent. Listen, and be wiser in future. If men are in the minority, they get on their high horses at once, and give themselves all manner of airs. I have always found it so. Aw—aw—rather look on this quadrille ; aw—aw—rather not dance this valse ! Just because they see one really wants them to be civil and of use. Human nature, I suppose. But have plenty of them, and amiability is not the word ; they won't miss a dance for anything, and rush frantically about to secure partners. Ask anybody, old or ugly, so long as she has two legs and doesn't squint, and if they are disappointed of one dance are as savage as possible. Then the women are all pleased, get lots of attention, and look twice as pretty in consequence. You see I am letting you behind the scenes, Mr. Nugent."

"You are indeed, but the plan must be a good one, for I hear your parties are capital."

"Well I really think they are not bad at all, at least people all look happy ; and I know when a roomfull of men and women look as if they wanted poking up, I have seen that kind of thing before now. Then I never dance myself, so can look after things and see that they are flourishing."

"You never dance !" said I, in horrified amazement.

"Not at home," she replied, with a laugh ; "it's a way I have."

"What can be your motive for so dreadful a deprivation ?" I inquired.

"Simply this, that at home I wish my friends to enjoy themselves, which they won't do if I neglect them, and dance off with every man that asks me. There is a deal of introducing to be done, and lazy men to rout out now and then, and lots of surveillance required in a quiet way ; so I think that for once in a way I will do proper and never mind myself. What does it matter ?—it's only now and then."

"Oh ! Miss Vane, this is terrible. I was anticipating such a delicious *deux temps*."

"Well, well ! no saying. Perhaps late in the evening, when people have all shaken into their places, and I am free, we may do a little business on our own account. So keep up your spirits, Mr. Nugent."

It was a capital party.

Miss Vane's three chief ingredients, floor, music, and men, were all to a wish. The men, instead of standing idly about, lolling up against door-posts, seeming to think they were conferring a vast favour by sauntering through a quadrille, were all energetically disposed, and rushed madly about, making up their book for the evening. Ladies were engaged dances deep, all the pretty ones at least ; and the Miss Thompsons were environed by a perfect phalanx of moustachiod youths, all ambitious of polkas and *deux temps*, and of having it in their power to say, "Know the Thompsons ? I should rather think so ! Who doesn't ? What fun these girls are."

Old Mr. Vane stood in front of the grate, fire there was none, and gazed with a bland expression on the evolutions of his numerous guests.

Mrs. Vane, in company with another ancient female, occupied a sofa in a corner.

"I hate lots of old women at a ball," Lucile privately confided to me ; "they are only in the way, are neither useful nor ornamental, and they just sit and originate scandals of every kind, and propagate stories that exist only in their own imaginations. Horrid old creatures some of them are, full of venom and spite if other people get more attention or are better dressed than their daughters. I only allow mamma one, an excellent old thing with no scandal in her composition, and who has no daughters to worry herself about."

Miss Vane herself was the centre of all attraction ; I never saw her look better ; and, as usual, her dress was most exquisite, clouds of snowy crape, festooned at the sides with bunches of superb cactus flowers, and a similar bunch at the back of her head. She had perfect self-possession and a great deal of manner ; and though she allowed herself considerable freedom in the style of her remarks, he would be a bold man who dared in any way presume upon this, and his setting down would be far from agreeable.

As she had said, she did not dance until very late in the evening, but flitted about in every direction, superintending matters generally. Major Clavering was cautiously attentive ; he was evidently not quite certain of his position in her good graces, and was afraid of making a move too soon.

Late in the evening, Miss Vane announced her intention of joining the dancers, and her first waltz was given to Major Clavering ; but I flatter myself that she had a better partner for the second, as the gallant major did not particularly excel in the Terpsichorean art, and was considerably more *au fait* at a five-barred gate than a *deux temps*.

Miss Eleanor Thompson and her *attaché* seemed in a state of great beatitude, and Fanny and I came right on a second edition of the camellia scene, which I have little doubt had exactly the same termination.

By this time I was pretty well acquainted with a number of the people in A——, knew all the young ladies more especially considered to belong to the barracks, and was on the most cordial terms with Miss Vane and the Misses Thompson.

My soldiering duties were not of a very arduous nature; I do not think that the army generally can consider themselves extremely hard worked.

A certain amount of parade and drill had to be gone through daily, and some few affairs relative to the arrangements necessary for my company; but I had no want of spare time, and contrived to secure a good deal of enjoyment of various kinds.

Colonel Grant and his warm-hearted wife were among my most valued friends, and few days passed without my looking in for a chat. Sometimes Percy Lascelles was my companion, but oftener still I went alone; as Percy was of a very erratic turn of mind, and could never be depended upon for a morning visit. He and I used to take long country walks, which we both enjoyed very much, and we also rode a great deal. I frequently joined some of the fair equestrians of A——, and endeavoured to prevail on Percy to be of the party also; but these invitations he invariably declined, and coolly declared that he couldn't be bothered with women. I should have believed him, only I always observed that his manner towards the softer sex entirely belied his words; for on the few occasions in which he was necessarily brought into contact with them, he treated them with a courtesy

and gentleness very much at variance with his pretended indifference to them.

However, he did not "visit," sought no introductions, but avoided them as much as possible, and the damsels of A—— had pretty generally given up his case as hopeless.

He had a distant bowing acquaintance with Miss Wylde, and the Thompsons, all of whom he regarded with intense horror, and would at any time cross the street to avoid them.

Miss Vane he did not exactly approve of either, and considered her clever but spoilt; clearly he had pictured to himself some beau ideal of a woman, the reality of which was not approached by any of the belles of A——. Mrs. Grant alone met with his entire approbation, and very much flattered the little woman was when I mentioned this interesting information.

They were very pleasant days, take them all in all, that I passed in A——; and in after years I often looked back with wistful regret to the quaint old town, and reflected that I had since been in many worse quarters.

The people were kind and hospitable, and we managed to get up a deal of fun of various kinds, and killed time in the most approved manner. One great resort of ours in the town was Mrs. Gray's, the pastry-cook's, and from two till five in the afternoon it was scarcely possible to enter her shop without encountering three or four of the gallant 144th lounging about in every variety of attitude, discussing town gossip with old Mrs. Gray, who knitted in spectacles behind the counter, and bestowing small talk and compliments on her pretty daughter Jemima, who in long

ringlets and countless flounces dispensed the tartlets and cherry brandy, and gave saucy replies to the admiring remarks of her military customers.

Mrs. Gray knew everything, and told us all that was going on ; who were giving parties, and who were going to them, and very pithy observations the old lady frequently made.

It was also wonderful how continually the A—— ladies required things from Mrs. Gray's shop ; the Thompsons especially, were for ever ordering buns or muffins, or one had a sore throat, and lozenges were required, or another could not get through the afternoon without a supply of chocolate. It is not to be supposed that they quitted the shop immediately ; on the contrary, many a long half hour or more did they spend over their purchases, which was surprising, as they constantly appealed for advice and assistance to the gallant subalterns there assembled.

Mrs. Gray knitted industriously during those little exhibitions, and apparently took no notice of what was going on ; but Miss Jemima did not so thoroughly approve of having her train of adorers coolly summoned to attend at another shrine ; and very pettishly she would toss her ringlets while Miss Fanny Thompson and Mr. Barry tested the quality of the new French crackers, or entered into learned disquisitions on the respective merits of chocolate *à la vanille*, and chocolate *à la crème*.

We went to lots of "hops" in the town, and dined out now and then with the more dignified county families ; we had luncheons in the barracks, and gave a very good dance ourselves in the mess-room, and the 144th were very popular in A——.

I went two or three times to London, and saw Colonel Nugent, who always received me in a very friendly manner, and hoped I did not smoke.

"Filthy habit! Vile practice! only fit for those dirty Germans, who swill beer from morning to night."

In this manner the winter had passed away, and spring was fast approaching, and I looked forward to getting leave of absence for a good long visit at home.

I quite longed to see all the old familiar faces again, and to visit all my favourite haunts; and I very much wished likewise to go to Egerton, where the kindest of welcomes awaited me. "L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose," and so it came to pass that my departure was delayed in a way I had certainly not expected; how it was I shall relate in the next chapter, as this is already more than sufficiently long.

CHAPTER XI.

LIFE AT THE FARM.

A RECRUITING officer and some men belonging to the 144th were quartered at a village in another part of the county; and Colonel Grant frequently sent some of the officers from A—— to the recruiting station on matters connected with regimental business.

Captain Lascelles and I were despatched thither on one occasion, and, our duty over, were returning by the express train to A——.

We had many other passengers in the carriage with us, and one of them, an elderly gentleman, began dilating on several horrid accidents that had lately occurred on various lines; and he exhibited an insurance ticket, without which he declared he now never travelled.

“One thousand pounds, gentlemen, I always insure to that amount; it is fifteen months since I begun the system, and though I have not had occasion to claim it yet, some of these days we shall have a smash, and I shall get my money.”

I ventured to hint that the accident might possibly be of a nature that would deprive him of all interest in the sum specified.

“Then my heirs and successors will come in for

the benefit; I am wide awake enough for that. So long as the railway company has to pay, I don't care a pin who gets the money. It's all through the cursed carelessness of their people that accidents happen, nine cases out of ten; and what compensation is it to a fellow who loses a leg or an eye to be told that the directors are very sorry, and have turned off some poor devil of a switchman who was only half up to his business, and has a wife and six or seven children depending on him for bread. I am not quite sure that I shouldn't hang somebody every time an accident occurred through carelessness, that might sharpen them up a bit; but at any rate I should fine them so tremendously that their pockets would cry out for a new order of things, which is highly wanted in every line in the kingdom. Five or six railway accidents of some kind or other in every morning paper, and if you sift to the bottom of the business, carelessness or stupidity caused nearly every one of them. I am most truly thankful each time that I put my foot out of the shaking, screeching concern, and should never travel by them at all, only they have driven all other modes of conveyance off the road."

Another passenger here offered an opinion as to their speed and comfort.

"What do I care for their speed? I am in no such desperate hurry to get to my journey's end; bagmen may fancy tearing about the country at the rate of fifty miles an hour, but I am not a bagman; and as to comfort—I see none in being sent spinning head over heels twenty yards up in the air, or in being buried in a heap of rubbish, with a tender and six or seven carriages on the top of you."

We all laughed, but our merriment received a sud-

den check, for Percy who had been looking out of the window, quickly exclaimed, "Hulloa! Something's up!"

Something was up indeed. We had barely time to rush to the window, and take in the uncomfortable spectacle of a field of labourers all suspending their employment and watching us with upraised hands and actions of horrified dismay, when a frightful concussion took place, and I can remember no more.

I afterwards heard that some coal-trucks had been suffered to remain on the line until too late to shunt them out of our way, and from the fact of their being so heavily loaded, the collision was most dreadful. The driver and stoker, unable to avert the calamity, (for we had just emerged from a deep cutting, and a sweep in the line of rail prevented their seeing what was in front) had leaped from the engine to save their lives; but the former fell on his head, and was killed instantly, the latter escaped with a few trifling bruises. Two third-class passengers were killed, and many of the others badly hurt. The gentleman with the insurance ticket had a broken arm, and in the midst of all his pain loudly declared that he would have his thousand pounds out of them for their rascally carelessness, and I believe he got it too.

At first it was thought that I was killed, as I had received a severe blow on the head, and lay perfectly senseless, the usual remedies producing no effect.

But a surgeon who was speedily on the spot declared that I still breathed, and a farmer whose house was but a short way off offering to have me removed at once to it, where I should meet with perfect quiet and all possible attention, it was decided to accept his proposal, and thither I was accordingly conveyed.

Twenty-four hours passed without the slightest sign of consciousness ; but a merciful Providence and the strength of youth brought me through what had very nearly cut the thread of my short life.

On the afternoon of the second day I opened my eyes to the realities of life, and began to have a glimmering of surrounding objects ; though I felt a strange sense of weakness, and a total inability to recollect where I was or what had brought me there.

I was in a large airy room, with diamond-shaped casements, one of which was open and admitted the sweet spring air.

The windows were partially darkened, and everything felt very cool, fresh, and pleasant.

I remained in a dreamy state for some time, listening to the distant lowing of cows, barking of dogs, poultry noises, and other signs of farm-yard existence. Where could I be ? certainly not in the barracks at A——, where I should have heard only the challenges of sentries or the various bugle calls of the regiment. By degrees it all came back to me, the journey, the shock,—then all was darkness, though I could arrive at the conclusion that I had been injured—how, I could not exactly discover.. I attempted to draw back the curtain of my bed, and only then discovered my total inability to do so ; but even the slight movement had been sufficient, Percy Lascelles was by my side in a moment.

“ All right again, old fellow ? ” he inquired in a cheering tone, while his eyes were glistening all the time. “ You little spalpeen, as Mother Brown would call you, what a fright you have given us.”

“ What’s the matter with me, Percy ? I don’t seem to have any strength left.”

"Why you got rather an ugly crack on your scull, that's all, and if you did not break your arm it was next thing to it. We'll take insurance tickets next time we travel, Charley. I wonder if that old fellow will get his thousand pounds?"

"And where am I now?"

"In the jolliest old farm you ever saw, a regular model concern. Fat old farmer, and a benevolent old farmeress with cheeks like apples, and such a pretty little granddaughter to wait on you, Charley. You have fallen on your feet in one way if you fell on your head in another. Such milk and such butter, and ducks and geese, and cherry-cheeked dairymaids, and all so concerned about the poor dear young gentleman."

"Well, but Percy, am I to stay here long?"

"That depends. Only you are uncommonly well off here, and in this world, Charley my boy, when you find you are so, you had better stick to it as long as you can. You won't be fit for duty for some time, the doctor says that."

That individual entered as he spoke, and after a short examination pronounced me to be doing well; only I must not be allowed to excite myself in any way, and for a few days must keep very quiet, in case of a reaction on the brain.

Colonel Grant had been informed of the accident, and had consented that Percy should remain till I was considered quite out of danger.

I had been bled very profusely, which, in all likelihood, had saved my life, but it had left me as weak as a child, and I was unable to do a single thing for myself. My servant came over immediately, and the kind farmer and his wife did everything in their power

to contribute to my comfort, the best that the house could afford was all placed at my disposal.

Farmer Morland was a thorough specimen of a fine old English yeoman, sturdy and independent in his views, a true John Bull of the agricultural class.

He was an elderly man, but healthy and vigorous ; with a keen eye and a ruddy complexion embrowned by exposure to the sun. I have seldom seen a finer-looking man of his years. Mrs. Morland was a worthy helpmate, a comely, active little woman, bright-eyed and rosy still, and bearing the traces of having been a very pretty woman in her youth.

Their whole family had consisted of one daughter, and speaking of her even now saddened the old couple.

She had been the rural belle of the country side, and had declined numerous advantageous offers of marriage, having given her heart to a poor curate who had lodgings in a neighbouring farm.

Though strongly averse to the match, (for the curate was in delicate health, and had no means but his scanty stipend) the father and mother could not resist the warm pleadings of their only child, and at last consented that the wedding should take place.

For nearly a year much happiness was the portion of the young couple ; but returning one night from a late visit to a dying parishioner, the curate was seized with an attack of bronchitis, which in little more than a week carried him to the grave.

The shock and the unremitting nursing were too much for his young wife, then just on the eve of her confinement ; and a few days after giving birth to a daughter she joined her husband in his last resting-place, leaving her orphan child as a legacy to her broken-hearted parents.

This girl, Amy Lesley by name, was now resident at the farm, and was the pretty granddaughter to whom Percy had alluded. But he might have called her something more than pretty, and not have transgressed the bounds of truthfulness, for she was indeed a most exquisite creature, and as unlike her belongings as anything could well be conceived.

The delicate style of her loveliness must have been derived from her father the curate, for she did not at all resemble a little portrait of her mother which was much prized by the old couple, and which was the likeness of a true country beauty, buxom and bright coloured, with an air of saucy consciousness giving expression to her pretty features.

Amy Lesley was none of this. She was very fair, with long flaxen curls flowing loosely round her white throat, and a complexion that for delicacy of bloom could only be compared to the inner leaves of the wild rose. Her violet eyes were fringed by deep lashes, and were lifted with a shy, wild glance and instantly cast down, for Amy had none of the confidence of young ladies in general, and was a timid, shrinking little thing, only at her ease when quite among her own people.

I had heard her low tones at my door making inquiries if anything were wanted, but two or three days elapsed without my seeing her, though I knew that the early roses placed in a glass by my bedside were of her gathering, and heard both from Percy and my servant of her anxiety on my behalf.

But Percy had been compelled to return to his duties at A——, promising to come and see me as often as he possibly could, and I began to find my enforced confinement rather tedious and irksome.

The kind farmer and his wife visited me frequently, and I liked their honest warmth and quaint conversation; but still I longed to make acquaintance with the pretty Amy, and thank her for all her kind attention. Perhaps they fancied something of the sort, for one morning after breakfast, Mrs. Morland said to me, "You're but young, Mr. Nugent, and like draws to like. I've got a granddaughter nigh about your age. I'll bring her up to have a crack with you, for us old folks is but dull company for you."

I hastily denied the latter assertion, but said I should be charmed to see her granddaughter if she would be troubled so far as to come and visit me.

"It's little trouble she'll think it, I reckon, when she is on the stairs all day to see if you require anything, and her first thought in the morning is if you have had a good night."

She then retired, and returned in a few minutes accompanied by the blushing Amy, who held a bunch of roses in her hand, but was much too shy to think of offering them to me, though such had been her intention.

If she were overcome by timidity I was struck equally dumb by her extreme beauty, and could think of nothing whatever to say to her, only staring at her in perfect wonderment. Good Mrs. Morland laughed and said—

"Well, they do say shame-facedness be but rare now-a-days, and mayhap you'll get on better by yourselves; so, as I have a busy morning before me, I'll e'en leave you to get better acquainted."

She accordingly left the room, and restraining an evident inclination to run after her, the fair Amy

seated herself in the window-seat, and began to hem a frill.

"I hope you are going to give me those roses," I began ; "at least, if you meant them for me."

She blushed deeply, and rising quickly from her seat, brought me the bunch in her hand.

"How sweet they are," I continued. "I have so enjoyed during my illness having them every day, and I believe I have to thank you for them."

No reply, but a momentary fawn-like glance from her uplifted eyes.

"Are you very fond of flowers?" I inquired.

"Oh yes, very!"

"When I can get up you must show me your garden."

"It is not very pretty now ; you should see it in summer."

"And so I shall if I am here ; but we poor soldiers are often packed off with scarcely any notice, and we might be half across the world before summer comes."

"I don't think I should like that," she observed.

"It is part of a soldier's hard fate," I replied ; "we must go where we are ordered, whatever it may cost us."

"You must feel very sorry sometimes," she said, in a pitying tone, "to have to leave friends and go quite among strangers."

"So we do at first," I replied ; "but sometimes we make very nice new friends. Now, if I had remained at home, I should never have seen your grandfather, and grandmother, and yourself." She smiled, and gave her head a little shake of dissent.

"I am quite serious," I replied ; "Amy, is not

that your name? May I call you Amy? It is such a pretty one."

"Is it?" she replied; "I never thought it very pretty. It is very common here."

"Do you know what it means?"

"No; does it mean something?"

"It means something very nice—Beloved. Now, don't you like it after that?"

"Yes; I like it better. It is a pretty meaning, but I never knew it before."

"But you have not told me if I may call you Amy."

"Of course you may. I am never called anything else; only the servants call me Miss Amy."

"And I may call you Amy without the Miss?"

She laughingly nodded her head and said—

"Yes."

We were getting on very nicely, and by degrees Amy told me all her life and experience of every kind, and how she had always been in the country, and only now and then had visited A—— for shopping.

"And did she never wish to live in a town?" I inquired.

No; she did not think she should like it. It was very gay and amusing just at first, but she soon felt confused, and the noise gave her a headache, and when she returned to the farm she always fancied what birds must feel when they escaped from a cage.

She was a very sweet, artless young creature, with a mind pure as the first ray of the morning. It was quite delightful to meet with such genuine simplicity after all the wiles and *minauderies* of the town-bred girls, with whom I had lately been associating.

She and I soon became excellent friends, and Amy

ceased to be shy with me, or to consider me as a stranger.

She was at first a little afraid of Percy Lascelles, but it soon wore off under the influence of his sincerity and kindness of manner, and we became a very cordial and comfortable party. Before very long I was pronounced well enough to be taken down stairs, and I occupied a sofa in the farm parlour, and was an object of interest to all in and about the house.

Farmer Morland would come in at intervals from his work, and, sitting down, would call for a mug of ale, drink regularly to my health, and would then indulge in a little desultory chat, chiefly on matters which he had gleaned from the newspapers.

His active little wife popped in and out all day long, and had always a cheerful remark ready for me.

And Amy came in and out too, and gathered me roses, and shook my pillows into more comfortable positions; and often she would take her work and I would read aloud for a little, and when I tired of that we had long, confidential talks; and all the thoughts and wishes of that guileless young heart were gradually unfolded to me, and I gave her advice after my fashion, and a very brotherly and sisterly kind of affection sprung up between us.

Amy was very fond of reading, but had no one to direct her in the choice of her books, and a most heterogeneous mass of rubbish had she devoured; I could not help being amused when she mentioned some of them. I made out a list of a few more suitable to her age and tastes, and ordered them from a bookseller; and when the box arrived, and Amy heard that they were her own, her rapture was beyond description, and would have been childish in any one else, but every-

thing that Amy did was becoming to her, she was so perfectly natural and simple. The old couple were delighted too, as they always were with anything that gave their darling pleasure, and I advanced amazingly in the good graces of the whole family—they would do anything for the “young captain,” as they insisted on calling me.

Nothing would induce the worthy farmer to accept the slightest remuneration for all the trouble and expense I had occasioned them; and as I found that pressing the matter would only wound his feelings, I abstained from any further mention of the subject, and took my own way of showing my gratitude.

He declared that my visit had done them all a power of good, and enlivened them famously; that he had not had such thorough good “palavers” for he could not say how long, and that I beat the parson hollow at an argument.

Indeed they induced me to form the most flattering estimate of my entertaining powers, for I was told that the old place would be a “sight duller” when I was gone, and that the front parlour would not look itself when my sofa was no longer drawn before the window, and the “young captain” was gone from his accustomed lounge on its capacious cushions. The dear old farm!

In the long vista of years I look back to its rose-covered trellis, and the diamond-paned casements, with long floating tendrils tapping lightly against them; I seem to hear the soft twittering of the swallows, the cooing of the numerous pigeons on the roof, the various farm-yard noises that filled the ear with sweet music and the mind with pleasant thoughts.

Once more I am dreamily reclining on the parlour sofa, the languor of a recent illness not yet entirely

disappeared; and as I lie there I hear kind Mrs. Morland pattering about the sanded kitchen, or holding self-supported conversations with her cat or her bullfinch; I see the sturdy farmer coming across the hay meadow, removing his hat to wipe his bronzed forehead with the splendid yellow handkerchief that Amy hates so much; while Amy herself is waiting his arrival at the little gate, and at the same time making saucy gestures to me that the two beautiful white roses she has just gathered, the very first of the season, are both going to deck her grandfather's rough frieze coat, while I know much better, and have the firmest possible conviction that in a few minutes she will bring me one if not both.

They were pleasant, pleasant days. On several occasions some of my brother officers came out to see me, and I was gratified by the kind interest they took in my accident, and the hopes they expressed that before long I should be strong enough to rejoin them.

Amy kept aloof at such times; she was always shy and uncomfortable before strangers, and though the 144th were, generally speaking, gentlemanly young men, and could have been safely trusted with my simple-minded companion, still I had sense sufficient to be aware that barrack acquaintances and barrack conversation were unsuited to a girl brought up as she had been, and with no knowledge of the world to guide her in her estimate of character.

Therefore Percy Lascelles and myself were the only members of the 144th of whom she had any actual experience, though she knew the rest well by name and character, as I had often amused her with descriptions of Splashton and Rynd's peculiarities, Barry's Irish jokes and pronunciation, or any other harmless

gossip that helped to make an hour pass more cheerfully.

But our quiet retirement was invaded one day in a manner I had little expected ; and a very agreeable invasion I thought it at the time, though it entailed consequences little looked for by any of the party. One lovely soft afternoon we were all assembled in the meadow close to the farm to give Amy the benefit of our advice in the selection of a lamb which was to be advanced to the high dignity of her especial pet.

The little creature had been chosen and caught, and Amy was endeavouring to fasten a scarlet ribbon round its neck, which it violently resisted, half in alarm, half in playfulness. Two or three times it escaped from her hold, and had to be recaptured ; while its astonished mamma wandered round and round, bleating mournfully, and quite unable to comprehend what the proceeding meant. So engrossed were we all in our occupation, and so heartily did Farmer Morland laugh at the escapades of the lamb, that we had not heard the sound of wheels, and were totally unaware that visitors were at hand, till the musically modulated voice of Major Clavering remarked just beside me,

“ Arcadia to the very life ; a perfect Corydon and Phillis.”

I rose quickly to my feet and felt that I blushed to the very roots of my hair ; though a moment’s reflection told me that no one of the farm party besides myself was likely to understand the allusion.

Major Clavering was by my side, polished and stately, and just at that moment he was looking at Amy with a cold scrutinizing air of insolent admiration that made the blood tingle to my very finger

ends; I could have knocked him down with the greatest satisfaction.

The *blasé*, heartless, cynical man of the world, what could he know of the purity and innocence of that young girl? But he could see her exquisite beauty of face and form, and he gazed at her till she became quite confused at such unwavering notice, and the lovely flush on her fair cheek deepened into crimson; while I could scarcely keep my hands off him, so indignant did I feel at his impertinence.

But Major Clavering was not alone, he had escorted little Mrs. Grant and Miss Vane, who said they had come to pay me a visit of condolence, and cheer me up with a whole budget of news from A——.

"And to think that our sympathy is entirely wasted," said Mrs. Grant; "for certainly if any person exists who requires less pity than another, it is Mr. Nugent."

"His life at present must be a perfect idyl," replied Major Clavering satirically; "a dream of the golden age. I really never came on a more charming scene, a poet's brightest conception more than realized."

"Now get off your high horse, Major Clavering, do!" said Miss Vane with a laugh, "or Phillis will think us all mad, and Mr. Nugent is looking as fierce as possible. Put the golden age on the shelf for the present, and let us be immensely commonplace and comfortable. Now that I am convinced Mr. Nugent's head is still on his shoulders, the very next thing I came here for was to have a syllabub, and have it I must, if I milk the cows myself."

I explained to Farmer Morland and his wife who my visitors were, and the warmest of welcomes was immediately given to them.

In a very few minutes both the ladies had captivated the good old couple by their genuine admiration of the comfort and neatness of everything about the farm, and by the interest with which they listened to the details of how things were managed.

The poultry, the dairy, all excited their ready praises, and Mrs. Morland was quite overcome by their enthusiastic remarks, and thought them "the nicest, most affable ladies she had ever seen."

The syllabub was promised at once, and a regular country tea in the best parlour was quickly laid out; for Mrs. Grant said they had dined early on purpose, feeling sure that Mr. Nugent would treat them hospitably.

I had nothing to say in the matter, but most hospitably they were treated, the "tea" was a regular wonder in its way.

Delicious new-made bread of Mrs. Morland's own baking, and a splendid seed-cake which had fortunately been composed that very morning, Amy and I having assisted at the performance, I beating the eggs, and Amy laughing at my awkwardness and the horrid fuss I made, so she said.

Then there were eggs of the very freshest, pats of the richest butter, a great jug of such cream as no dairy but Mrs. Morland's could ever produce, honey like liquid amber, what was there not indeed? Little Mrs. Grant quite screamed with delight, and declared she had not seen anything so charming for ages, not since she was a small child in a white frock and blue shoes, and that it had taken years off her life, and made her feel quite young again.

She insisted on the whole of them joining our party, and would take no denial, though Mrs. Morland re-

sisted the proposition violently ; but Mrs. Grant carried the day, and both she and Miss Vane were so perfectly simple and easy in their manners, and suited the conversation so completely to the style of thing, that the worthy farmer and his wife soon felt quite comfortable, a great deal of Amy's shyness vanished, and we were the very merriest party possible to imagine.

Major Clavering too made himself most agreeable, and if the honest farmer did not feel quite as much at his ease with him as with the rest of us, he was much struck with his grand manner, "so dignified and yet so plain," and the major, too, ended in winning all hearts.

When tea was over we went out again for a stroll, and then came the grand affair of the syllabub.

Miss Vane and I assisted Mrs. Morland in the first preparations, grating nutmeg, mixing the wine and brandy, stirring in the sugar, &c., and then we all declared we must accompany the ingredients to the cowhouse, and see that they received full justice in the milking.

The remaining four of our party had wandered away all this time, but supposing them to be together, we had not troubled ourselves as to their whereabouts. But on returning from the precincts of the dairy, I holding aloft the bowl containing the richly foaming syllabub, we found Mrs. Grant and Farmer Morland standing in the porch, Major Clavering and Amy not to be seen. I declared I should find them in a minute; and instantly starting on the search, I explored all the nooks and corners about the farm that I knew to be Amy's favourite haunts.

For some little time I was unsuccessful in tracing

them, when stopping to listen for their voices, I heard the major's mellifluous tones on the other side of a low hedge at one end of the garden, and immediately after the pair came in sight.

They were walking very slowly, and Amy, with shyly-bending head and half-averted eyes, was listening to something that Major Clavering appeared to be explaining. He held a green leaf in his hand, and in a moment I saw that an edition of the flower scene in *Faust* was there being enacted before my eyes.

He urged her to try the spell for herself, and as she timidly shrunk from receiving the leaf, he took her hand and placed the leaf in it, saying, with a look and tone of peculiar softness,

"Try it, though with you the test must be ever unnecessary, for who can see you and not love you."

All this took place within the space of a few seconds, and I instantly warned them of my presence, not caring either that Amy should hear or I listen to any more of Major Clavering's civil speeches.

There was a slight constraint between us as we retraced our steps homewards. I felt rather annoyed, and Amy was certainly confused; Major Clavering talked for us all, and gave us time to recover our equanimity.

The syllabub was pronounced most excellent, and had ample justice done to it; and then Mrs. Grant and Miss Vane declared that they must no longer delay their departure, sorry though they were to tear themselves away from such kindness.

Most cordial leavetakings were exchanged between us all, and the ladies said they should certainly find their way there again before very long, Mrs. Morland

and her husband assuring them they should be only too delighted to welcome them to the farm.

Major Clavering added graceful acknowledgments to those of his fair companions, but he did not say anything about returning, not that I heard, at least.

We had a great discussion on our guests after their departure, and I perceived that they had all made a most favourable impression on my kind host and hostess. Amy was charmed with Mrs. Grant, and she also liked Miss Vane, but that young lady's oddity and *brusquerie* had puzzled her not a little, being so very unlike anything she had ever encountered before.

She also liked Major Clavering, and fancied that his manner was the same as the knights and courtiers she had read of; so stately, and such an air of condescension; it was clear to me that little Amy's head had received a twist in the wrong direction from the major's delicate and insidious flatteries.

Very soon after this visit I returned to A——, my health being sufficiently re-established to enable me to return to my duty.

I quitted the farm and its hospitable inmates with sincere regret, and with many promises of visiting them as often as I could: and I frequently drove over while I remained at A——, taking with me books or trifles likely to gratify their simple tastes.

It seemed, however, that I was not quite so strong as I thought, and, after suffering from two or three very severe headaches caused by some slight over-exertion, our regimental surgeon advised me to apply for a month's leave of absence, and betake myself for perfect recovery to the bosom of my family circle.

I required no urging to this course, and immediately asked Colonel Grant for permission to pay a visit at

home, a request he at once granted, with a kind hope that I should return quite cured ; and so I once more set out on my travels, only this time it was in the other direction.

CHAPTER XII.

LIFE AT HOME.

I FOUND all at home very flourishing, and all delighted to see me. They declared I looked remarkably well, and not the least like an invalid, and were inclined to think my illness rather a sham, more especially when I imparted to them the very pleasant life I had led at the farm.

My mother was very proud of my improvement in manliness and height; and her aversion to a military life had considerably abated, though she endeavoured to convince me that her warnings had nearly come true, as the railway accident might have been my death.

"A miss is as good as a mile," was my irreverent reply, "and you see I'm not killed this time; besides railway collisions may happen here as well as elsewhere."

"Only they don't," volunteered Tom; "but your scull being of the thick order came off better than most people's. Better luck next time."

Tom is considered incorrigible now, and has long proved himself completely impervious to every species of scolding or hint; so he is now left alone, and that is

found to be rather more efficacious in silencing him than the other plan.

My mother and sisters, especially the latter, are never weary of putting questions to me about my soldiering experiences.

They soon know all my brother officers' names and characters by heart, they quite love Mrs. Grant, and they think the A—— young ladies must be very amusing. Annie must learn our various bugle calls, and the rich tones of the grand Broadwood are made subservient to the "*assemblée*" and "*réveille*," while she goes up and down the house humming "advance," and "retreat," and "cease firing."

And Flora and she both order shawls of my regimental tartan, and create an amazing sensation by wearing them in our market-town; and I entirely decline escorting them through unexplored meadows, seeing that the most peaceably-disposed bull might well be startled out of his equanimity by two such apparitions.

And Flora who is of a more lively turn than her sister, quizzes me most unmercifully on every possible subject, and declares that all my actions and attitudes are studied to be quite *à la militaire*; and she makes slanderous caricatures of me in a swaggering position, my hand gently caressing my upper lip, where she insinuates nothing under Lord Rosse's telescope could possibly detect any prospect of future moustaches.

In short, I am roasted on all sides, but very much made of as well; Groves is deference itself, and "Mr. Charles's" me in the most correct manner; while our old cook having in some way heard that "the poor dear young gentleman" had been ill, has imbibed the

impression that I have come home to be "cooked up," and seems to imagine that nothing but absolute turkey cramming will have the desired result.

I am assailed at all hours and at every corner with insidious offers of sustenance, and have scarcely entered a room before I am instantly followed by a tray loaded with closely-covered basins, small plates with another inverted upon them, and curly strips of toast, all savouring strongly in appearance of water-gruel and invalid decoctions generally, though in reality they contain the very choicest tit-bits in the Langley larder.

My brother John, the collegian, came home soon after my arrival; he had been visiting some friends, having a short time before taken his degree and quitted Oxford.

Jack was a worthy fellow, and his faults and follies, such as they were, had been those of youth; Jack's heart was in the right place, and a deal may be forgiven when that is the case.

It had never been considered probable that the conflagration of our great metropolitan river would occur through his agency, and misty visions had pervaded the family circle, strengthened by remarks rather stronger than hints from Tom, that Jack would be "plucked."

But that mortification had been spared my worthy brother, though I doubt whether he would have felt it as such; his temperament was philosophic, and to all the ills of life Jack turned a blind eye and a deaf ear, winding up his perorations with the unanswerable observation that it would be all the same a hundred years hence, which it very likely would.

Jack had a most heavenly temper, which he had never

been known to lose under any amount of provocation, not even when Tom's impudence was brought to bear on his most vulnerable points.

At college he was excessively popular, and considered one of the best fellows going.

He had a handsome allowance from my father, but he was much too easy to refuse a demand of any description; he refrained from nothing that he was requested to join; as long as his money lasted it was always forthcoming on application, and when it was all gone he went on credit. This made him a general favourite, but was rather an unpleasant discovery for my father, who had to pay bills for him to an amount he did not at all relish.

But Jack was now at home, "on the loose," as he called it, for being the eldest he had followed no profession; and "Gad," he said, "it's devillish slow work. 'Pon my word, Charley, I think practising the goose step must be better than doing nothing at all."

Certainly poor Jack's time did hang rather heavy on his hands, for he did nothing earthly from morning to night, but yawn and smoke cigars.

Not being the shooting season, he had not even that blessed resource for most idle men; to be sure he did knock about the billiard balls now and then, but he did not care very much for it. He used to light his weed after breakfast, and saunter away down to the stables, to improve his college lore by a little equine information derived from the head groom. Then he sauntered back again, took a game at billiards, and lighted more weeds.

Then Jack did great things at lunch, and bore patiently a good deal of quizzing on his industrious way of passing his morning.

After lunch he would sometimes join my sisters and myself in a ride, but not if we were going to call anywhere, for Jack was painfully shy with women, and thought a petticoat a far more formidable sight than the stiffest fence you could meet across country. At college he had lived entirely among men, having carefully eschewed tea-parties of every description, and he had not even beguiled his spare time by a passing flirtation with any of the numerous young ladies of low degree to be found in college precincts, daughters of scouts and porters; for Jack was a diamond, though in some respects a rough one; and if his head were sometimes in fault, his heart never was, and neither daughter nor parent would ever have cause to rue the day that they first set eyes on his honest countenance.

Jack and I had not been much together for several years, but we had always felt a strong brotherly regard for one another, and we were the best of friends now.

A peculiar out of the way chamber had been specially appropriated to us as a smoking-room; and wonderful colloquies did we hold therein, Jack and I comparing our experiences.

Though he had been three years at college, and at a large public school before that, it was amazing to me how fresh and unworldly many of his ideas still were.

Jack looked always on the sunny side, and never on the other; he thought the world was a jolly good place, lots of fun going, if you only knew how; and a certain old gentleman not half so black as he is painted.

Then, when very hard pushed, he could always fall back on the doctrine of its being all one a hundred years hence, and nobody could gainsay that; so Jack rolled on through life, liking and being liked, and he

certainly resembled the young bears in so far that all his sorrows were yet to come.

Now that my father had two grown-up sons at home, he and my mother thought it a very good time to dispense a little hospitality ; and wonderful family conclaves were held as to whom it was most necessary to invite.

During my absence a great friendship had sprung up between my sisters and Lady Lyle ; and I was rejoiced to find that Sir Frederick and herself had accepted an invitation to pass some days at Langley Park. On a Tuesday they arrived.

The well-appointed barouche swept up to the hall-door, Lady Lyle's charming face smiling from the window ; and in another instant I was cordially shaking hands with her and her worthy husband.

" Bless the boy, how he has grown !" was her laughing remark ; " ' Ill weeds grow apace,' eh ! Charley ? "

" I intend to be a steeple before I'm done," I replied ; " so I shall be in a state of utter depravity by that time. How are Fred and Willy ? "

" Oh ! most flourishing, and quite pining to see you again."

" One for me, and two for themselves I am afraid. Heaps of monsters in prospective."

" I rather expect that has a little to do with it, though they were deeply offended at your hints about pudding love."

My mother and sisters now appeared to receive their guests, and a most affectionate greeting took place.

I don't know what your custom may be, dear reader, but mine is to welcome a friend the moment he arrives, and not to wait till he is formally preceded by the

servant across the hall, perhaps up a long stair, and so into the room where I sit in stately dignity awaiting his entrance.

I call this a chilling reception. I don't like it myself, and from that very motive I avoid it in the case of others.

When I reach a house where I am going to stay, I like to see a friendly countenance expanding into a pleasant smile as I descend from the vehicle; I like a friendly voice to bid me welcome, and a friendly hand to grasp mine, ay, and to give me a good hearty squeeze too—none of your limp touches for me.

It is just possible that the man who merely dabs his fingers against yours may be a good Christian in the common acceptation of the term; he may attend church regularly, and go through some suppositious form of devotion in the interior of his hat; he may rival the clerk in his sonorous repetition of the responses, and he may audibly chink yellow sovereigns into the plate on collection days.

I don't think I should fancy sitting next him in an omnibus on my return from the Bank, and I am quite sure I should not leave an open letter in the room if he were alone. Still, as there is no rule without an exception, in some rare instances a man of this kind might be trusted under the above-mentioned circumstances; but never tell me that in him the widow or orphan will find a protector, the poor a benefactor, or any human being a friend. No indeed!

People say they can tell a person's character by his countenance, his skull, his handwriting, his fingers, possibly his toes; I will tell it by his voice and the way he shakes hands.

In the voice as in metal, there is a true ring and a

false ; and any one will, with the slightest attention, detect the difference.

If the eyes are the index of the soul, most surely the voice is the index of the heart ; its tones are full, open, and genial where the current runs clear and steadily ; they are strained, artificial, and querulous where bad temper, selfishness, or a hollow, cold disposition are in the ascendant. So is it with shaking hands. Give me the grasp that makes you wince with sheer torture, and which you feel for an hour ; give me this in preference to the faint touch that makes you long to fling back the hand in its owner's face, so much do you detest the apathetic greeting. Some day when I have time, I really intend to write a treatise on hand-shaking ; there are a number of very odd varieties in the world.

I have known several very quaint methods of performing the ceremony that I have by no means objected to, seeing they were well meant, and were only abortive attempts at the right style of thing.

A very warm-hearted man I once knew, treated his friends' digits as if they were pump handles ; he gave one immense wrench, it was fortunate that it was only one, or the arm must have remained in his grasp, as no human socket could stand such treatment.

But all this is a digression, and I must return to Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle, who are undergoing a series of greetings from the various assembled members of our family circle ; and finally her ladyship is forcibly abducted by the womankind, and carried off to my sisters' own peculiar sitting-room, where I know they are going to toast their feet on the fender, and ruin their appetites for dinner by imbibing tea and devouring thin slices of bread and butter *ad libitum* ;

seasoning the entire proceeding with all the tit bits of gossip they have mutually accumulated since their last meeting.

What can make women so fond of tea ?

At five o'clock they assemble as regularly as so many old washerwomen, and attack the mawkish fluid and its accompaniments as though luncheon had been a thing unknown.

What a cigar is to a man, a cup of tea seems to be to a woman; she flies to it for consolation in any trouble, and (excuse a fearful pun, forced from me under the circumstances) in the grounds of the tea she appears to find grounds for consolation. Long may it be found there, and most welcome are the dear creatures to their favourite beverage; many a merry hour have I passed while assisting at this truly feminine meal in old libraries in the country, the lamp as yet unlit, and only the flickering firelight shining on the gay circle around it; the saucy belle bidding her favoured cavalier prepare her cup for her, and then laughingly informing him that he has made it so horridly she can scarcely drink it, and adding for his special behoof that men are sad useless creatures, and are certainly degenerating, when they can't even make a decent cup of tea.

But she drinks it, let me tell you, and confesses at the end that it was not so very bad after all; nay, she will even venture on a second, "if he will try and improve."

And he whispers that under her tuition he will improve in everything, and it is well for her that no lamp is there to reveal her blushes; and he returns to hover round her chair and obey her slightest behest, and

those two are very happy that idle hour by the glancing firelight.

Well, we have all separated to dress for dinner, for we are going to have a party; and by and by my mother comes down in her soft gray satin, with a large black lace shawl, and a delicate blonde cap, the very picture of a fair English matron in the autumn of her days.

Annie and Flora appear in white muslin and simplicity; and I am very proud of my two pretty sisters with their merry blooming faces and their pleasant unaffected manners; thorough ladies are they both in style and behaviour, and bright ornaments of the home circle. And then Lady Lyle glides into the room, fearing she is late, and clasping a pearl bracelet on her exquisitely rounded arm: a lovely French robe of some green gauzy material, proving how fearlessly she may venture on that generally unbecoming colour, for she could not possibly look more charming.

I offer to fasten the obstinate bracelet, and then feeling myself privileged to be saucy, I examine her rings, exhibit my much-prized turquoise and tell her that it is very odd how her bracelets are always coming unfastened, and that I wonder if the fact of clasping them being a very pretty attitude for showing a very pretty hand can possibly have anything to do with it.

And Lady Lyle laughs, raps me over the knuckles with her carved ivory fan, and says it is melancholy to see the depravity of boys now-a-days; that all veneration for their seniors has departed from the world, and were these the manners of the 144th, for if so they are much in want of amendment?

But now the door is thrown open, and Groves

makes the sounding announcement of "Lord and Lady Hartington and Miss Hartington," presently followed by that of "Sir Theodore Anson," and "Mr. and Mrs. Dashington Bold." These are among the *élite* of our country neighbours.

Lord and Lady Hartington are our great folks *par excellence*, but they are simple and unaffected, and by no means try to overwhelm people with their grandeur; their position is established, and they don't keep forcing it constantly on one's notice.

Lord Hartington takes the chair very often at county meetings, and he makes very good speeches, more distinguished by plain good sense and gentlemanly feeling than by brilliant oratory.

His property is well cultivated, his tenantry prosperous and contented, and his establishment is handsome without ostentation.

Lady Hartington inclines to be stout, and looks very good-natured. She wears a few fine diamonds and some rich old lace; but I think my mother has much the advantage in dignified bearing, though Lady Hartington has a very quiet, ladylike style.

The daughter is a nice merry girl, and her honourable prefix is no obstacle to her making herself very agreeable, and asking me all manner of questions as to my new mode of life, whether I like my regiment, and if there is a good set of officers.

Cissy Hartington has been two seasons in town, and is quite a wide-awake young lady, and not troubled with any *mauvaise honte*.

She affects the military too, and regrets that none are stationed within reach of Hartington, for they *are* such an acquisition in the country.

She is quite *au fait* in the mysteries of "pipeclay,"

and talks about "depôt battalions" and "service companies," and asks "how we stand on the roll for foreign service?"

Annie and Flora are in a state of unmitigated amazement at her knowledge, and inquire where on earth she picked up all those queer expressions; and Miss Hartington smiles in her superior wisdom, and says she doesn't know, she learnt them somehow.

And Flora shakes her head knowingly, and holds up a sly reproving finger; and Cissy half blushes and half smiles, and all of a sudden I call to mind that in some former letters from home, mention was made of a handsome young hussar who had been staying at Hartington, some distant relative of the family; and that Cissy and he sung duetts together, and wandered through the quiet wood-walks, and did not seem to dislike each other at all.

Cissy has bright blue eyes, and a fair English skin, with cheeks like a damask rose; and has a pretty little waist, and stunning hands and feet; and if ever the hussar calls all those charms his own, I can only say that he will be a very lucky fellow.

Sir Theodore Anson is one of our "great catches," and he doesn't know it—oh! no. A fine old property, family ditto, and clear fifteen thousand a year.

In the matrimonial market he has been a first prize for many a year; but the sagacious baronet knows his value, and no bidder has as yet bid high enough to please him.

Take care, Sir Theodore! You are no more a young man, but what the French call "*encore jeune*;" but between those two there is a difference let me tell you.

You are a good-looking man, no doubt, but lines

are dawning on your expansive forehead, and curious tracery is lurking about the corners of your eyes ; and, worst sign of all, your hair is allowed to grow long, and is carefully brushed across that large bald space in front. Sir Theodore, you will soon be like poor "Uncle Ned," and

"Have no hair on the top of your head,
The place where the hair ought to grow."

Now for the Dashington Bolds.

The gentleman may be passed over with scarcely a remark ; he was quite number two in the domestic circle—he was simply Mrs. Bold's husband.

A little fair man, with a meek voice and manner, gentlemanly enough, but certainly not manly. His wife was a handsome woman of four-and-thirty, tall, dark, and showy in appearance, a lady, though rather a remarkable one.

She affected singularity, and if it were her ambition to be considered odd, she had most decidedly obtained it.

She had two passions—horses and music.

Every meet for miles round she attended, better mounted than any man on the ground, and her riding was a perfect miracle. Nothing stopped her, stone wall, hedge, ditch ; over she went, totally scorning any proposal to open a gate for more moderate egress.

I believe the men present were often inclined to wish her at Jericho, for some of them were by no means such thorough Nimrods as herself, and did not exactly relish risking their necks at the fences she cleared ; but how could they dismount and lead their horse through a gate, when a lady had just taken it with no apparent exertion to horse or rider ?

Every morning, and frequently in the course of the

day, Mrs. Bold sallied forth to her stables, and spent long intervals in the society of her four-footed pets, who all knew her voice and step, and neighed with pleasure at her approach.

Her hands and pockets were full of bread for them, and they would rub their noses into the mouth of the latter to search for their customary treat. They followed her about like dogs, and obeyed her orders most readily—it was an odd sight, but really a very pretty one—and when so employed Mrs. Bold was in her element.

She held long consultations with her head-groom, Bob; not that that was really his name, but the first she ever had was called Bob, and as she said she could not be plagued remembering the creatures' names, she engaged them all to answer to this one.

She had four children, pretty little creatures they were; but often several days elapsed without her inquiring for them, and it was reported that she had frequently met them and remained totally ignorant that they were her own.

Their names she could not always recollect, and of their ages she had not the remotest idea; any one inquiring was referred to the head nurse for information.

The management of her house and servants was to her a matter of the most perfect indifference, she said; but I do know that it was a very jolly place to stay at, and that nowhere were the plates hotter or the wine better iced, nor could you easily find a more respectful and attentive set of domestics.

An old housekeeper who had been Mrs. Bold's nurse was at the head of affairs; she doted on her mistress, who she said had the kindest heart breathing,

and she was as deeply interested in the credit and well-being of the family as Caleb Balderstone. Horses and music I have said were Mrs. Bold's ruling ideas, and at the piano alone was she truly and thoroughly a woman. What a voice she had, rich and voluptuous, and full in tone as an organ; I have never heard anything like its superb quality either in public or in private. She always selected grand old songs, none of your flimsy modern trash, but the rarely sung compositions of the ancient masters, to which her glorious tones did full justice.

She sang very readily too, no false airs and graces, but an immediate compliance with an expressed wish to hear her; but she would only give very little at a time, beyond a certain point she would not go, and it was useless to ask her, her decision was fixed and unalterable. She did not much affect the society of women, they were in general "vastly stupid," she said; and neither was Mrs. Bold at all popular with her own sex. After dinner she would lounge back on a sofa, and examine the ladies through her glass, or she would draw a small table towards her and wander moodily through a volume of engravings, just to kill the time till the men reappeared.

"I can't stand all that horrid rubbish about children and servants that the women prose about after dinner. Can't they leave them alone if they are well enough, or pack them off and get others if they don't do; but for mercy's sake don't let them inflict all their troubles on every miserable victim they can lay hold of. They tried it on me at first, but I told them I did not know how many children I had, and as to measles and hooping-cough, I had no idea if they had had them or not.

"The servants I did not know by sight, but imagined we had some, as the beds were made and the rooms swept; the grooms were the only ones I concerned myself about. Gracious! if you had only seen how they stared, and turned up the whites of their eyes; and now all virtuous matrons eschew my company, and gather up their spinster broods when I am in the way, lest they become contaminated by my fearful sentiments."

I said that Mrs. Bold was very handsome: a large well-developed woman, with flashing dark eyes and a haughty expression, and magnificent round white arms. She dressed richly but plainly, and never wore anything but white or black.

"I am as regular as the seasons: white muslin in summer, black velvet in winter, and it saves me such a deal of trouble. I never give my dress a thought; and am not plagued by my maid bothering me as to which dress I will wear, and which trimmings; or if I wish the pink wreath laid out or the green velvet. What a nuisance all that must be! whereas I have only one gown in the wide world, and it is always ready. It does amaze me to hear women discussing each article of their dress just like so many milliners, where they got this fringe, and how much it cost a yard, and the immense difficulty they had in matching such and such a ribbon. I call such details perfectly sickening, they weary me beyond expression, and yet I give you my word most women get quite animated on those subjects, though if you were to speak to them about a horse or a book (unless it were a novel) they would feel as bored as possible, and scarcely give you a rational answer. No wonder I prefer the society of men, who alone can converse like sensible beings."

By this time my readers must have a tolerable idea of Mrs. Dashington Bold, who now fills a capacious arm-chair in the drawing-room at Langley Park, her handsome person attired in the invariable white muslin, with a brooch and bracelets of very valuable cameos.

Her rich, dark hair is plainly braided and bound round her head, undecorated by flower or ornament; but simply dressed as she is she looks very stylish and imposing.

It happens that I take her in to dinner, and some of her remarks I have already presented to the reader.

I must confess she amused me very much, and certainly I found the dinner anything but a tedious one.

Fourteen was the number at table, and it was never exceeded, for my father and mother hated large mixed parties; and as most of the guests were well acquainted, there was no silence or stiffness, and conversation was very frequently general.

Oh! the alarming pauses that sometimes occur where the party is not well assorted, where no sound is heard for several minutes but the jingling of the forks and spoons, and some unfortunate individual finds his last far from sapient observation has had the benefit of a profound silence on the part of everybody else.

No one will speak for quite an age, till at last some compassionate guest starts a singularly commonplace remark, and all the rest instantly rush to the rescue, and for a time there is a subdued buzz of conversation, shortly to be succeeded by a similar interregnum.

In a general way dinner-parties are a bore, unless very skilfully managed.

You get introduced to somebody for whom you don't care a rush, and you have to devote yourself to

her during the weary meal ; while the very individual you covet for a partner at table is remorselessly bestowed on another person, and seated where you can't even look at her.

On this particular occasion I sat between Lady Lyle and Mrs. Bold, and certainly could not complain of any want of conversation.

I was quite sorry when the ladies left the dining-room, and quite reciprocated Mrs. Bold's remark that it was "a horrid bore" our remaining behind at all.

As my sisters decidedly relished her rather *prononcé* style of discourse, she did not this evening follow her usual plan of retiring with a candle and a book of prints ; but when I rejoined the fairer portion of our guests, I found Lady Hartington and my mother deep in matronly colloquies, the younger ladies clustered round Mrs. Bold, who was holding forth in very animated terms.

I joined in immediately, and the discussion was laughingly continued till there was a general demand for music, and I led Mrs. Bold to the piano.

With a light and brilliant finger she ran over an impromptu prelude, and then her splendid tones burst forth in an exquisite air of Pergolesi's, a great favourite with her.

Sometimes her voice swelled into the richest cadence, and then died away into soft notes of liquid sweetness ; her whole soul was in her performance ; it was difficult to imagine that inspired-looking woman walking over heavy fields in strong hob-nailed boots, or dashing recklessly on with the hounds, heedless of obstacles, and never scarcely absent at the death.

A couple of Handel's sacred compositions followed, even more beautiful than the first ; and then Mrs.

Bold's labours were over for the evening—beyond three songs she would not go.

Miss Hartington, who was good-natured, and did not mind contrasts, treated us to a few of the fashionable melodies of the day ; and did not sing badly, only of course after Mrs. Bold everything was feeble.

Then my sisters and I came out strong in the glee line, and got through several in great style ; Lord Hartington and my father standing by in a wonderful state of delight, for this kind of music was best suited to their tastes.

And then came the carriages, and our guests departed ; and a tray came in with wine and water, and we all gathered round the fire and discussed the party.

And finally, bedroom candles were lighted, and the ladies wished us good night ; and Jack and I adjourned to the back premises, and indulged in cigars and Bass.

Good night, reader ; I am very sleepy.

CHAPTER XIII.

BARRY'S LETTER.

I CANNOT conscientiously declare that in a general way the gallant 144th had the pens of ready writers. Most of them considered a letter in the light of a frightful infliction, and nearly always connected with some unpleasant phase of financial difficulties; indeed the greater part of them seldom undertook a literary labour of this nature unless for the purposes of applying to their governors for a little pecuniary assistance, or of prevailing upon their troublesomely attentive creditors to "wait a little longer."

So I had not many letters from A—— barracks, Percy Lascelles being my only regular correspondent, and he did not write very often. Besides his letters, when they did come, consisted merely of a few lines, principally inquiring if I were all right again, and hinting that he missed my curly noddle as he meditated over his pipe in the evening, and should not be sorry to see Vixen and myself occupying our old places once more.

News he never condescended upon, and as to gossip, the bare idea of ever hearing any from Percy was a simple absurdity; so as I had a mild feeling of curiosity to know how things and people were going on

in A——, I sat down one afternoon and wrote to Barry; bidding him answer my letter immediately, and give me every bit of information he could collect, both civil and military.

In a few days the reply came; and as on the whole it was rather a wonderful production for Barry, and gave me a tolerable insight into proceedings generally at A——, I think I had better lay it before the reader, and trust to his or her indulgence for my jovial brother sub, who must have devoted a very considerable portion both of time and mental labour to the performance.

Here it is.

“A—— Barracks.

“MY DEAR NUGENT—Sure, among all the sins that I have committed in my life, that of letter-writing was never laid to my charge, and it isn't a great hand you'll find me at that same. But you say you want to know what we are all about—and, if that is all, faith, it's soon told. We're doing nothing, my boy; and every one of us is helping the other at the work. Faith, it's yourself, my dear fellow, that has all the luck of it, getting knocked so nicely on the head, and being sent home to be coddled by your blessed family, instead of having to stick on here at this confounded drill and early parades. It isn't just the pleasantest thing in life to have to bolt out of bed when that horrid bugle begins, and to kick your heels about for two hours or more in the barrack-yard, without a bite or a sup in ye to keep the cold out.

“We hear the general is to be down on us in the course of time, so I suppose the colonel is getting us into condition beforehand.

“There's one or two changes since you left. Etherege and Trueman have come here from the

depôt, and Bell has gone there, which won't break your heart. Both the others are very good fellows, you are sure to like them. Etherege is a little queer at first, but capital when you know him ; and Trueman is a regular brick. By the by, a new youngster has joined, and you are no longer the last ensign. His name is Fleming, and he is not a bad fellow at all, only as mad as a hatter. Sure, I can't tell you all the odd things he does, but he'll end in Bedlam as sure as my name is Barry. Mother Thompson has got hold of him, and he is doing civil to Clara ; but for all that he looks soft, and a fine promising case for her books, I expect he is sharp enough to keep out of that mess. Little Fanny is in high training for the Clavering Cup, but I have an impression she will find herself distanced by Lucile Vane ; only as she is away just now, visiting relations, Fanny has the course to herself. That stuck-up fellow, Haultain, of the Artillery, is still dangling after Eleanor ; and odds are being given that she will hook him after all. I don't know, neither do I much care.

“ We've had some awful rows in the Rookery lately ; this new fellow, Fleming, being at the head of them. One night the noise was terrific, and Trueman got wind of it, and came up and gave us all a precious wiggling, saying he should report us to the colonel next time. Sure, it was only like Bedlam let loose ; and the liquor had been flowing too freely by a long chalk. Fleming was so far gone that he could hardly stand, and yet he looked as solemn as an owl ; I nearly died with laughing at his queer face ; but he is a good fellow for all his odd ways.

“ That beastly regulation of wearing uniform at all times is being strictly enforced, no shirking the

matter at all now; and it is a most confounded nuisance.

“At first we tried to dodge the authorities, and had some preciously close shaves of it. Jones was in Mrs. Gray’s one day, in mufti, when Clavering came in; and Jones had to bolt over the counter, and keep in hiding all the time he was there, for he had a small tiff with the major the day before, and he would certainly have reported him. And Splashton was at the Thompsons one morning, calling, and Colonel Grant was announced; so as he had no time to get out of the way, Fanny stuffed him behind the curtain; and the Colonel began admiring the view from their window, and Splashton expected him to get up and have a closer look at it, when, perhaps, he would not have been so much pleased with what he did see. Splash told me he was dying to sneeze, and nearly choked himself in stopping it. After all, he had his trouble for nothing, for he came out as soon as they thought the Colonel was gone, but like Paul Pry, he had left his umbrella in the room, and came running up for it; and there he found Splashton and the Thompsons in high glee at his escape, and a nice sell it was for Mr. Splash. Old Grant looked rather grave at first, and Splashton thought he was going to pitch into him; but the Thompsons begged him off, and the Colonel was very civil about it, and let him off for that time. But it’s a no-go now, and I’m very much afraid we must knock under; but it it a disgusting bore, and no mistake. Mother Brown is getting bigger and bigger every day—sure, she is a wonderful woman. Splashton told her yesterday that once round her in a morning was much too violent exercise, and that it must be done at twice

now. She is a jolly old soul, and I owe her a bill as long as my two arms ; and sure, I told her the other day I would remember her in my will, which I thought was about the soonest that she would see any of her money.

“That same is a blessed fact ; and faith, I wish it was not, if only for my own sake. There’s a fine opening this minute, for a young man with a good head for figures, in overhauling and settling the nice little mess my affairs are in, and are likely to be in for some time, too. Sure, we haven’t enough pay to keep body and soul together, let alone the *et cæteras*, which nobody ever dreams of paying—at least, I don’t. How on earth is a poor devil to live and look like a gentleman, on far smaller pay than many a man gives his cook ? Sure, he can’t do it, and be honest too !

“‘But what’s the odds so long as we’re happy?’ That is my motto, and a very good one too ; and I always bring it to mind, if I feel I am getting a peg too low, which will happen now and then.

“There’s many a good fellow in this world far worse off than Ned Barry ; and if we all had our deserts, it’s may be more kicks and less halfpence I’d be getting this day. But you’ll be thinking it’s queer times when I have taken to preaching, that same not being much in my line ; so, having said all my say, and got rid of all my ideas for the present, I will e’en conclude this performance. The top of the morning to you, Charley my boy, and don’t be away any longer than you can help, for we’re all missing you, and wishing you back again.

“Yours truly,

“EDWARD BARRY.”

CHAPTER XIV.

COUNTRY HOSPITALITIES.

TWO or three dinner parties followed, of a similar description; and then Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle departed, having remained upwards of a week.

Before leaving, they exacted a promise that my sisters and I would visit them the following week, when they expected a succession of visitors. This we consented to do, and accordingly set out at the time agreed on.

As we drove up the avenue, we saw Lady Lyle and her two boys in a side walk; and, leaving my sisters to proceed to the house, I jumped out and joined her. Violent demonstrations of satisfaction at my arrival were showered on me by Fred and Willy; and Vixen, who had, of course, accompanied me, also came in for his full share—a proceeding which excited intense disgust in the minds of Pysche and a very snappish little spaniel who bore her company, and who had no idea that such affectionate attentions were to be lavished on anyone but themselves.

“Pauline knows your sisters’ rooms, so I shan’t mind going in just yet, it is such a lovely afternoon. Besides, it will be the only time I can have you to myself, for an age. We are going to have a horrid

houseful of people, and most of them I don't care a pin about; but one must go through a duty of that kind now and then."

"Who are they?" I inquired. "Give me the *carte du pays*."

"Oh! don't ask me, they will speak for themselves. Vastly commonplace in a general way, one or two exceptions however. Sir Frederick had a note to-day from Mr. St. John, offering a visit, as he was in the neighbourhood. In London, Granville St. John is a star of the first magnitude, handsome to a degree, and really not bad if he were not so insufferably affected."

"I hate affected men. It is bad enough in a woman, but not to be stood in a man."

"Horrid, isn't it? but it is all caused by the women spoiling him; some people absolutely worship him and no head can stand that."

"Well, I shall not like him any how."

"Oh, yes! you will. I tell you he is not bad. I have rather a *penchant* for him myself; and he mostly affects married women—considers it a safer investment for his attentions, I suppose. Then I have a pretty widow coming, Charley, but not for a day or two—she is a nice merry creature, and has such eyes."

"I can't bear widows, Lady Lyle, especially when they mean to marry again; and if they are merry and have fine eyes, it is most probable they have designs that way."

"Very likely; but she is a fascinating creature, Charley, and widows have a way with them. However, you are too young, and not eligible enough to suit her books; most likely she will devote herself to Mr. St. John—but *garde à vous*, for she knows how to

flirt, and may give you a turn of it *pour passer le temps*."

"She may save herself the trouble," I replied. "I have had quite a dose of flirts lately, and am sick of the whole concern. One gets tired of them, they are all so much alike; go through the same paces for everybody."

"Now, Charley, no slang; and, above all, no stable slang. I am not Mrs. Dashington Bold. I wonder why men nowadays cannot speak five minutes consecutively without dosing one with sporting metaphors; we have not all groomish tastes."

"Well, I hate slang as much as anybody; but I suppose our language must be deficient in forcible expressions of the proper kind, for certainly some of the slang terms seem just to be the right word in the right place. 'Slow' and 'fast' now, what could one do without them, whole sentences in a word; and 'seedy,' if it is not elegant, it is most uncommonly suggestive—the small hours, limp collars, red eyes, and brandy and soda water, are implied in every letter of it."

"I am afraid, Charley, you have had severe practical experience of its application, you speak so feelingly on the subject."

"We are all mortal at times; quite an involuntary pun, I assure you," I replied in a deprecating tone; to which her ladyship rejoined that it was too frightful for comment, and that I should put half-a-crown into a poor-box she had on purpose for offences of a similarly deep dye.

After some more chat of the same kind, Lady Lyle said, "Duty before pleasure. We must go in now;

some of those people will be arriving soon, and I can't be out of the way."

We accordingly turned our steps in a homeward direction, and had just reached the hall-door, when a travelling carriage dashed up, laden with ladies' maids and imperials.

A large matronly lady descended, followed by a couple of young ones of more moderate dimensions, and a tall, thin, elderly man brought up the rear.

They were Sir Clement and Lady Gascoigne, and their daughters—country neighbours of the Lyles, only rather distant ones.

Introductions took place, and presently Sir Frederick appeared and carried off the father to the library fire, where they discussed weather and turnips, and all the various local topics interesting to the landed magnates of a county.

The fairer members of the party, under her ladyship's wing, were for the present consigned to her pet boudoir; where the rattle of cups and saucers speedily proclaimed that the convivial refreshment, peculiar to the time of day, was in the ascendant.

I went off by myself to the garden, and comforted myself with a weed; during which time I heard the roll of several other carriages, and narrowly escaped being run over by one on my return.

Utter silence reigned in the establishment on my entrance; and, having ascended to my own premises, I devoted myself to the all-important subject of the toilet, proceeding to the drawing-room with my sisters, just as the gong announced that in five minutes dinner would be on the table.

This was an Egerton custom, and, I think, a very good one. You had not the *gêne* of waiting for ever

so long, while the people were assembling before dinner, but might make your appearance, if you chose, only in time to be introduced to some young female, and receive your commission to look after her wants during dinner-time.

There seemed to be a considerable concourse of people in the drawing-room, and I glanced round on a surveying excursion. They were all strangers except Sir Theodore Anson, who vouchsafed me a nod as my eyes lighted on him. All the Gascoigne family were assembled; the young ladies very unexceptionably got up, one in blue tarlatane, the other in pink, and their dresses were very well made, the important items of gloves and slippers quite in keeping. They looked thorough London girls, well-born and well-bred, with the most perfect contempt for everything and everybody not sanctioned by "their set," by whose views and opinions alone were their own regulated. I gradually found out who all the people were, and to save trouble shall mention it now.

There was a little woman in pink silk, a Mrs. Belmont, rather pretty, but with a look as if there were a temper somewhere in the background. She had long fair ringlets and languishing blue eyes, and inclined to be sentimental; nevertheless, when she glanced at her husband, which she occasionally did, he nervously suspended whatever might be his employment at the time, and would stop short in the middle of a sentence, and look confused and uncomfortable. Said husband was dark and like a gentleman; he looked very peaceably disposed, but was not otherwise remarkable.

Then there were Mr. and Mrs. Vining, well-dressed and well-mannered, and very like eighteen out of every twenty people one meets.

Mr. Vining had an excellent appetite, and did full justice to his meals: his principal characteristic appeared to be a weakness for dry port.

Mrs. Vining was matronly, and looked good-tempered; but she bored one dreadfully about her children, and seemed to fancy everyone must be as interested about them as she was herself. Servants too entered largely into her vocabulary of troubles, but this I was mercifully spared.

Sir Theodore Anson I have already described.

He was languidly imparting some information to the eldest Miss Gascoigne; while she listened with all the interest and attention due to the possessor of a baronetcy, fifteen thousand a year, and the finest family diamonds in England. Her sister was conversing with a tall attenuated young man in clerical costume of a very High Church description, whom I afterwards discovered to be the Reverend Felix Neville, a cousin of Lady Lyle's. Nature had intended him to be very good looking, but he had imbibed an idea that this was not an orthodox state of matters, and had set up a vigorous opposition. His naturally wavy brown hair was rigidly plastered down on each side of his face; his eyes were usually cast down either in pious meditation or to display remarkably fine lashes, I am not sure which; and his well-cut features were composed into an expression of resignation and meekness that was refreshing to see. His costume was by no means neglected however: his closely-buttoned black coat betokened the cut of a first-rate West-ender, his boots had a fine ecclesiastical polish, and his broad-hemmed pocket-handkerchief was of the most delicate cambric, and the initials F. N. were neatly inserted in a corner with what

looked very like fine dark hair. They are curious things pet parsons, and this was clearly a High Church clerical dandy of the first water, in full training for a bishopric when a few more years had rolled over his head.

In the mean time he refreshed thirsty souls with the streams of his eloquence in a fashionable Belgravian chapel, where stately carriages discharged at the porch the same party they had conveyed from the opera a few hours before; and their flounced and feathered occupants met on the conclusion of the service, and remarked in the same breath, "What a touching sermon—it was really charming!" "How delicious Mario was last night!—'Spirto Gentil' was perfect."

Two gentlemen, father and son, stood at the end of the room, and appeared rather in a forlorn condition. Their name was Dutton, the father a wealthy merchant who had retired and bought a large property in the county; he was stout, bald, and a little vulgar. The son looked very weak and mild, a pale-faced youth, shy, and evidently far from feeling at his ease.

One more description and I have done.

Mr. Granville St. John had thrown himself back on a sofa quite out of the general circle, and was amusing himself by teasing Psyche, who lay on a cushion beside him.

He was a *blasé*, fashionable-looking man of seven or eight-and-twenty, with handsome aristocratic features, and an air of great refinement, but at the same time very supercilious in his manner. He had the smallest possible feet in exquisite black silk boots, and his tie was a miracle of art. His hands were proof positive of his gentle descent, if there be any truth in the idea that the aristocracy chiefly shine in this particular. I never saw them more perfect in a man.

"Come here, Charley," said Lady Lyle; "I wish to speak to you."

"All attention," I replied, as I pulled forward a low seat, and took a position by her side.

"There's a very particular friend of yours here to-day."

"Is there?" I replied. "I'm afraid the pleasure is all on their side, for I know nobody here."

"She is not come down yet, but she told me she knew you. A very nice girl, but not pretty, only very rich. They call her the ugly heiress."

"Nice description."

"Well, she is undeniably ugly, and yet all men rave about her."

"Golden spectacles of course. But who is she? I don't recognise your portrait."

"I won't tell you. Oh! here she is. Now look."

"Miss Vane! Well now, I call this very nice. How do you do, Miss Vane? I'm uncommonly delighted to see you."

"I suppose I must say something civil in return for that. Well, I'm rather pleased to see you too."

Miss Vane was accompanied by a little elderly spinster whom she told me was her aunt, and not a bad old soul when one got to know her. The young lady herself was in her usual force, and, as was customary with her wore a most striking toilette: an ample-skirted dress of brown crape over rich white silk, looped up in front with a large bunch of bright roses, and a garland of the same round her head. She was a wonderful instance of the power of dress; for plain as she really was, not to say downright ugly, I defy anyone to have done otherwise than pronounce her a

striking-looking girl. Her very fine figure certainly helped her greatly.

"Here is dinner," said Lady Lyle; "I suppose you must take Miss Vane, Charley."

"With all the pleasure in life," I replied; "we shall have no end of things to talk about."

"I am afraid that is a rash determination of yours, Lady Lyle," said Miss Vane. "When Mr. Nugent and I come in collision, propriety of conduct is a thing unknown; we set a shocking example of gossiping propensities to our neighbours."

"Speak for yourself," I replied, "I shall be extremely decorous; I only want to know everything that is going on in A——, and all you have been about yourself. Excepting a letter from Barry, I am quite in the dark."

"Sure, you don't mean to say that 'mee boy Barry' left anything untold. He is the amanuensis of the 144th; I don't think any of the others can spell."

"What a libel!" I exclaimed; "we are quite a literary corps, Splashton writes poetry."

"You don't say so! How nice it must be! My only experience of his talent in that line was one evening at our house when we tried to get up some *bouts rimés*, and Mr. Splashton privately applied to me for a rhyme to 'moon,' saying he could think of nothing but 'balloon,' and the idea would not work in at all. I suggested 'spoon,' as being decidedly applicable, but he wouldn't have that either. He is not a Milton by any means, but a very well-disposed young subaltern, and his forte is emphatically a *deux temps*."

"I like Splash very much," I replied, "and I think he is rather clever."

"Then I don't, but possibly he may be for a soldier; you are the best judge."

"Do you consider we are all donkeys, Miss Vane?"

"Most of you; it's very odd, what a number there are in the army. I don't wish to be personal, but I have some very fine specimens of caligraphy that emanated from the A—— barracks, the regiment we'll not mention. Once on a time, a very nice young ensign choose to become spooney about me, and he sent me some verses. They were delicious. I really thought I must have them framed and glazed; only the tender passion merits respect even in ensigns, and he was a very nice boy, and can spell now."

"You took him in hand, I suppose?"

"Yes. I made all my future civility depend on his learning a column of Johnson's dictionary daily, honour bright; and it was wonderful the progress he made."

"In the fairy tales, the princesses used to send their admirers all over the world, to get impossibilities for them; yours was a much better plan."

"Of course it was; everything I do is sensible, Mr. Nugent. Have you not discovered that yet?"

"What salary do you allow your trumpeter, Miss Vane? I'm open to a good offer. As *The Times* says, 'a young man having a few hours at his own disposal is willing,' &c."

"You are far too pert, Mr. Nugent, and I shall have to snub you if you say much more."

"Evil communications, &c., I suppose....."

"Now Mr. Nugent, shall I begin?"

"Please, don't. I lay my arms at your feet. And now tell me how on earth you come to be here; I have had no explanation of that fact."

"My aunt knows the Lyles somehow, and I happened to be staying with her, and was included in the invitation. There's the mystery solved."

"Does your aunt live near here?"

"Some miles off. I've expectations from her, so every now and then I come and do a little duty, but I should not wonder if she left all her money to an hospital; sometimes she threatens it when I aggravate her past endurance."

"Oh! you do that sometimes?"

"Rather. She is a good old soul as I told you; but old maids and young ones don't always pull together, and my aunt and I are not exceptions to the rule. I laugh at her old fashioned ideas, and tell her that they are coeval with the Ark, and she is shocked at mine, and holds forth pretty strongly now and then; so our discussions are occasionally more plain than pleasant."

"Now, I fancied you so good tempered, Miss Vane; don't dispel the pleasing illusion."

"Ah! you see that appearances are very often deceptive. My aunt sometimes tells me that I shall be a handful for some decent man by and by; which in ordinary language means that if ever any man is unfortunate enough to be plagued with me for life, he will not have to search for troubles."

"Now, Miss Vane, you know that it would only be polite in me to say that he will be a remarkably fortunate individual, but you have so strictly forbidden me to pay you compliments, that I am afraid to open my mouth in that line."

"Quite right; I hate them, and they are so completely a matter of course, that they mean nothing."

"Well, tell me how you pass your time with your

aunt, it must be rather a change from your life at A——."

"A change indeed, and not for the better; but the penance has to be undergone once a year at least, and so I make up my mind to go through with it as well as I can. What do I do? Well, let me see. The day seems endless, I know that; so I go to bed early, which my aunt thinks very sensible, not guessing the reason. Then I rise very late, of which she does not approve at all; and every morning when I make my appearance at breakfast, she lectures me while I am eating it, the same old arguments each time."

"They say perpetual dropping will wear away the hardest stone, so perhaps Miss Leeson acts on that belief."

"Perhaps she does; in which case she must be as hopeful as she is persevering. Then when she has scolded me sufficiently, she goes off to give the unhappy domestics their turn; and for a considerable time every day, I hear her anathematizing them all in rotation. This seems to be a safety valve provided for her by nature, for she returns in a highly amiable frame of mind; indeed she is really not so ill-natured after all, it mostly comes out in talk, her deeds are kindness itself. She reminds me of the Scotch saying, 'Her bark is waur than her bite.'"

"Well, and how do the old lady and your obstreperous self get through the rest of the twenty four hours?"

"I kill time somehow: read, write; women manage these matters much better than men. The worst of it is that my aunt has some frightful idea that exercise is good for health; and as nothing short of an earthquake would make her miss her afternoon

airing in the carriage, she usually marches out on a constitutional excursion before lunch."

"And drags you with her?"

"Indeed, no. I rebelled from the very first. It is bad enough to be victimized in the afternoon, and take a solemn jog along the turnpike road, three miles an hour the regular pace. I can imagine no worse infliction; and every day I come home, my jaws are nearly dislocated with yawning."

"You are really to be pitied; it seems a case nearly allied to the treadmill."

"Completely. In fact I think the hard labour crank would be an agreeable variety. Then we come home, much invigorated and enlivened, as you may suppose, by the locomotion; and after dinner my aunt indulges in a stealthy siesta, which she regularly denies on waking up; and during the remainder of the evening, we contrive a little feeble gossip, or my aunt tells me wonderful tales of the days of her youth, when she was a standing toast among the beaux of the neighbourhood, and could number her conquests by dozens."

"Then how does it happen that she is not married? I can see that once on a time she has been pretty, and you say that she is well off."

"Just like you men, fancying every woman would marry if she could. My aunt might have done so over and over again, for she was both pretty and rich, and she was once engaged. The man was good looking and agreeable, devotion itself apparently, and all seemed fair for happiness; but her money was all in some concern or other that went wrong, and everything was supposed to be lost. Then her lover cooled, and she saw it. An explanation took place, and she offered to release him from his

engagement. Of course he talked a lot of rubbish to try and blind her to the horrid meanness of his conduct; but the long and the short of it was that now her money was gone, he did not care for her. She liked him very much, and on finding him false, it soured her nature, and she vowed never to marry, which resolution she has kept in spite of many efforts that were made to shake it. The conclusion was that the concern righted itself, her money was more than doubled, and her first love had the audacity to propose to renew their engagement, saying his feelings had never altered, but prudential motives had compelled him to act as he did. My private impression is that he could not have enjoyed the interview, for I believe my aunt gave him a bit of her mind, and judging from my experience of her under those circumstances, she is rather at home in such matters."

This is a sample of our conversation during dinner time, and there was certainly little intermission in our discourse.

Mr. St. John sat on the left hand of Miss Vane, but she never deigned him a word or a glance, and he was almost entirely silent. One of the Miss Gascoignes had been committed to his tender mercies; and at the commencement of the repast, I heard her attacking him languidly on all the stereotyped topics of the London world, or rather the west-end one. She received "yes," and "no," in all imaginable tones of indifference; but nothing daunted she persevered in forcing him to reply, though he looked bored to the last degree. Though the young lady was not particularly to my taste, I really felt sorry for her, and thought her perseverance merited greater success.

Once or twice I detected a covert smile on Mr. St.

John's lips, as during some lull in Miss Gascoigne's attempts at conversation, he overheard a few of Miss Vane's saucy observations; but he received not the slightest encouragement to speak to her, and never tried it all dinner-time.

When the ladies had taken their departure, Mr. St. John and I found ourselves bounded by Dutton senior on one side, and Dutton junior on the other.

I made a faint essay at an interchange of ideas with the son, and found him imperturbable to the last degree, a happy combination of rusticity, ignorance, and stupidity.

Being thus floored in my amiable endeavours to promote conviviality, and feeling no desire to trouble the unsociable piece of languor on my left, I poured out a glass of '34 claret, and was preparing to resign myself to my reflections till a decent time should elapse, and I might rejoin the ladies, when Mr. St. John, who had been placidly enjoying my struggle at civility, smiled faintly, thereby showing a row of perfect grinders, which gleamed under his silky brown moustache.

"I am afraid you have made but a poor exchange of neighbours. Your fair friend had the gift of the gab to a most desirable extent. I quite envied you all dinner time."

"She is a very lively, unaffected girl," I replied.

"Seems so, and is delightfully ugly into the bargain." He said this as if it were high praise, and seeing I looked a little surprised, he added, "'Pon my word I mean to be complimentary, it *is* very refreshing to meet an ugly woman. I am heartily tired of aquiline noses and rosebud mouths, and regular features are a weariness of the spirit."

"Certainly Miss Vane's won't bear inspection," I replied, "but she has some good points too."

"So I saw," he replied. "Good head, perfect hands. I forgive a great deal when the hands are all right; it is a weakness of mine," and he glanced at his own taper fingers. "Are her feet to match?"

"Perfectly," I replied.

"Oh! then never mind her nose and mouth. She dresses well, too; has some originality in that line. You won't believe me when I assure you that the frightful repetition of white, blue, and pink, keeps me away from half the balls in the season. An order for court mourning quite raises my spirits. I shall make a bargain with my wife, if I ever have one, that she is never to wear anything but black without my special permission."

I had some more discourse with Mr. Granville St. John, and found him more agreeable than I had expected.

He was affected certainly, but not unbearably so; and I could believe that when he came to be rightly understood, he was likely to be a considerable favourite, especially with women, who forgive much to a man if he has a carefully trimmed moustache and a pair of dark dreamy eyes, fringed by long black lashes. We presently adjourned to the drawing-room, and found the fair creatures looking as if they rather pined for our society; but when I hinted that to Miss Vane, I received a severe snub for my pains.

I introduced her to my sisters, but they did not quite understand her, and looked a little amazed at some of her remarks; she told me afterwards that Annie was a pretty muff, but she had some hopes of Flora. They were both very civil to her, know-

ing her to be a great ally of mine; and by degrees they became considerably more sociable.

Then we perpetrated a little music, after which the room was cleared and we danced, and I had the satisfaction of several vales with Miss Vane, and enjoyed them much.

Altogether the evening was decidedly an agreeable one, and Lady Lyle as usual, a model hostess, leaving you a good deal to your own devices when she saw you were getting on well; neglecting nobody, and showing kind consideration for all.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SMOKING ROOM.

IT was latish when we broke up, and most of the gentlemen lighted bedroom candlesticks and departed in the wake of the ladies; but Sir Theodore Anson, Mr. St. John, and I decided on first refreshing ourselves with cigars and brandy and water. To the smoking room we accordingly adjourned; and very speedily that comfortable apartment was hazy with the curling fumes, and Sir Theodore and Mr. St. John were astonishing my weak mind with their allusions and remarks generally.

I am not quite sure whether the effect produced would be beneficial were a bevy of matrons and damsels placed within hearing on some such occasion; but I can answer for the fact that they would be considerably astounded at what would then meet their ears.

It is not to say that their actions are commented upon in a manner that would be far from giving them satisfaction, but their most secretly cherished designs, their very ideas and wishes are laid bare with an unsparing touch, and pleasantly discussed with a delightful freedom that is very charming to hear.

Things that have been whispered in the strictest confidence are here proclaimed on the house tops, and

furnish materials for a sneering sarcasm, or a coarse jest. Men compare notes with one another, and stimulate their appetite for scandal by recounting many an anecdote that has gone far to ruin the fair fame of the person discussed.

Poor Mrs. Dash! when you met Captain Freeman that morning in Kensington Gardens, you did not imagine that your conduct and conversation were introduced to the notice of a select committee of smokers that evening at the "Rag and Famish;" that your languishing glances and coquettish wiles elicited uncomplimentary remarks from the very same men who gracefully lift their hats to you in the Park, and secrete roses from your bouquet, which they tenderly insinuate will be prized beyond the gift of an emperor.

You will scarcely guess that these men are now very merry at your expense; that Slasher of the Blues is jocosely relating what a flutter you were in at Lady A——'s, where Captain Freeman did not at once join you, but stood for some time in the doorway talking to that flirt Miss Carew; and little Tom Linton is giving a florid description of a conjugal tiff between Mr. Dash and yourself in a corner of the crush-room, where he chanced to be in your vicinity. Very indignant would you be if you could hear the roars of laughter with which each fresh revelation is greeted, and all these men are prime favourites of yours, and every evening swell the train of idle dangles that surround you in public.

And you, dreaded, and yet much to be pitied Mrs. Mantrap, who daily and nightly immolate yourself on the altar of maternal solicitude, would it not excite compassion in any but the hardest heart to

hear your carefully concealed plots exposed to insulting merriment, the schemes you are so cautiously hatching known and perfectly appreciated by the very objects of your designs?

Never say that the race of martyrs is extinct; we have daily living instances of it in the virtuous middle aged matrons of England, those at any rate who have three or four plain and portionless daughters on their hands.

Look at their toils! Wonder and admire.

At an hour when their old bones are crying out for the repose which should be their portion, these unflinching paragons decorate their withered forms for fresh scenes of festivity, and undauntedly set forth on the never-ending chase, often repeated unsuccessfully for many a weary season of watching and waiting.

All honour to ye, old ladies! when I am prime minister, which is a doubtful event, my fixed intention is to institute an order of merit for the proper decoration of those warriors of many a ball-room battle field.

Wonderful Mrs. Mantrap! truly she would deserve to rank in the first class, for the unwearied patience and unswerving determination she has displayed in her career as a manœuvring mother of England. Has she not attended ball after ball in the long hot season, when Clara was endeavouring to hook some landed proprietor with a flourishing rent-roll, or eldest son with good expectations? Did not the groves of Richmond and Hampton Court know well that portly form, when Eveline was in cunning pursuit of young Harry Millamour, and sagaciously thought that mossy banks and leafy forest glades were more potent

auxiliaries than the stereotyped rendezvous of Rotten Row and the band in Kensington Gardens?

Many a nibble did Clara Mantrap have at the objects of her matrimonial aspirations, but never one bite; and Harry Millamour responded most touchingly to Eveline's would-be romantic platitudes, and quoted Byron and Lalla Rookh as they sauntered confidently under the branching elms; but that astute young gentleman never transgressed the bounds of the strictest flirtation, and though he was charmingly ready to grace Mrs. Mantrap's hospitable board, and devote himself to her *entrées* and champagne, yet did he come through the ordeal unscathed, no vestige of an approach to a declaration ever escaped his carefully-tutored lips.

Alas! poor Clara and Eveline. Great has been your faith, and greater your perseverance. When will the maidens of England cease so to degrade themselves, when will they arrive at the conclusion that it is a lowering of the dignity of woman when she oversteps the limits of her native modesty, and takes the initiative in that which was never meant for her province?

Clara and Eveline, it might have taught you a lesson, though a bitter one, could you have listened to Harry Millamour and his friends on their return from some gay scene where you had worn your brightest smiles, and displayed your strongest attractions on their behalf.

Then would you have heard Mr. Bullion recount how you discarded young Greyling of the Temple when he claimed the quadrille for which you were engaged to him, and coolly stated you were afraid there was some mistake, as you promised to dance

this one with Mr. Bullion, who has the mind and manners of a drayman, but the income of a duke.

Then would Harry Millamour in a pleasant and racy tone of enjoyment inform the approving circle how you, Eveline, with an air of the most artless innocence contrived to beguile him into the deepest recesses of the conservatory, and then suddenly affected anxiety and timid helplessness, and hoped your mamma would not be uneasy about you, or wonder at your absence.

"No, that trick wouldn't play," he knowingly observes, and whiffs away afresh at his cigar.

I have, however, made a long digression from the smoking room at Egerton, where much the same style of performance is being enacted; and where I am drawing deep draughts of wisdom from the manifold experiences of Sir Theodore Anson and Mr. Granville St. John.

I discover from their discourse that the Gascoignes are girls of this sort, and are a continual beacon and terror to all unmarried disposed eligibles.

I then know that Mr. Neville has first-rate church preferment in prospect, no end of influential connections and all that sort of thing; and I am told that it was capital fun to hear Louisa Gascoigne following suit with all his pet notions, and conversing with artless enthusiasm about parish schools and clothing societies, and hinting that no occupation in life was so congenial to her tastes as teaching the ragged village children, and carrying flannel petticoats to the rheumatic old crones their grandmothers.

This orthodox young parson is, however, supposed to be quite as wide awake as need be, and not at all likely to suffer from any delusion either optical or

mental on this point, so his friends have no cause for anxiety on his behalf.

"Not but that Loo Gascoigne is as good a specimen of the kind as most going, said Sir Theodore; "and if men mean to marry, they must do it some time or other, and after all it is only a question of who is most successful in hooking them in."

"Of course, parsons ought to marry," remarked Mr. St. John, "if it were only out of regard for the feelings of their female parishioners, who immediately commence a neck and neck race when a bachelor ecclesiastic is at the winning post; and men with large estates seem possessed with a morbid idea that they must be transmitted in a direct line; but in a general way I think marrying is a rash experiment, from which I have every intention of refraining."

"Well, it occurs to me that some fine day I shall put my head in the noose," said Sir Theodore, "but more as a matter of necessity than from choice."

"Just as I said," replied Mr. St. John, "out of consideration for Bromley Court and its broad acres."

"Very likely," said Sir Theodore, lighting a fresh cigar; "but anyhow, I shall fight shy of the whole clique of manœuvring mothers and daughters, and look out for some woman that never was in London in her life, and has not a wish or an idea beyond her father's shrubbery."

"Don't flatter yourself that the article exists, my dear Anson; country simplicity has exploded long ago; they get all the London fashions and follies second hand, and they rather deteriorate in the transition."

"You were always a sceptic, St. John," responded Sir Theodore; "now my opinion of women is not

uncommonly high, but you have no belief in them at all."

"My knowledge of them and my opinion are pretty much on a par," said Mr. St. John, negligently, as he gently stroked his delicate moustache.

"And neither of them very flattering to their fair objects," replied the baronet, with a laugh.

"Perhaps not," said Mr. St. John, carelessly; "but I take people as I find them, and neither seek to make them better nor worse."

"Nugent has been looking whole volumes of dissent during this discussion," remarked Sir Theodore; "I see his faith is still unshaken as a squire of dames. Angels they are every one."

"No," I replied; "not every one. I have met them both indifferent and bad, but I have also met them good and simple-minded; only to know them was to respect and love them. They are not all of the kind you describe, Mr. St. John."

"Ah! the charming enthusiasm of youth," said Mr. St. John, in a plaintive tone; "once I thought as you do, Mr. Nugent, and was ready to do battle with whoever uttered a word in their disparagement. But this was in the days when I was green and unsophisticated; those golden dreams were dispelled long ago, and I am now hard as the nether millstone."

"And yet I am told that you are a very popular character among the women whom you pretend to despise. How is that, Mr. St. John?"

"So people tell me occasionally, and it really surprises me, for I have not Anson's golden mantle to cover the multitude of my sins. It must be a fine thing to be rich, for I have always remarked that wealthy people have no faults; and things that would

not be tolerated in other men, are in them merely considered harmless eccentricities. I wish my father had been a soap boiler or a sugar refiner, or something equally lucrative; instead of which he was only a miserable captain of hussars, and left me nothing but his blessing and an old tumbledown rattletrap of a house, with a few acres of wretched land, mortgaged for more than their value."

Sir Theodore laughed. "Don't be taken in by him, Nugent. This is his way of speaking of a moated grange he has somewhere in Cheshire, that has belonged to his family for centuries, and which I know he would not exchange for Blenheim or Chatsworth. Deny it if you can, St. John."

"I have a kind of sneaking regard for the old place, I acknowledge," replied Mr. St. John; "but there is nothing of the order of old squires about me, who kill their own mutton and brew their own ale; my inclinations affect a snug set of chambers in the Albany, and half a dozen handsome women with easy going husbands, to whose houses I have the free *entrée*."

"And both of these desiderata you enjoy at the present moment. It is rarely the case that a man has the precise thing he wishes; but you were ever a favourite of the gods, St. John."

"My dear fellow, I believe you are mocking at my misfortunes. There, you, with a stroke of your pen, can raise thousands of pounds; while I find my table piled with harrowing entreaties from my numerous tradespeople, imploring me to give them even a trifle in payment of their 'little account,' to prevent them from being bundled out of their domiciles bag and baggage, sick wife, seven starving children, and another *en route*. Till I knew better, I used to wade

through these epistles, and give myself a fit of the blues in so doing; but now I order my servant to pitch the whole kit of them into a box, and never let me see or hear of them again if he doesn't want to lose his situation. It's the only way, believe me, but it does not alter the fact of their being there."

More discourse of the same kind followed, and then we betook ourselves to our respective chambers. I lay awake for some time pondering over the information of various sorts that I had received, and then arrived at the conclusion that it was no use bothering my brains any more about it, as I could do no good; so I turned my face to the wall, and was soon in a very comfortable state of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XVI.

“SAVE US FROM OUR FRIENDS.”

THE merry, cheery breakfast-table, what a pleasant sight it is ! The bright crackling fire, for though the mornings are mild, we cannot yet dispense with the exhilarating blaze ; the snowy cloth ; the long table heaped with a profusion of good things, and a still more magnificent display on the sideboard ; the hissing urn, with the graceful form and beaming countenance of Lady Lyle partially obscured by the misty vapour ; and though last not by any means least among the pleasures of this truly social hour, the array of letters and papers laid by their owner's plate, containing a fund of news and gossip for that day, if nor for many others. We are assembled at Egerton, a large and an animated party. The bright morning beams seem to have diffused vigour and vivacity into every heart ; all are inclined to be good humoured and chatty ; the clatter in the room is something prodigious.

“ I hope you are aware,” said Lady Lyle, in the hush of a momentary pause, “ that we are going to be immensely dissipated this week ; all sorts of gay doings, a perfect round of festivities—archery *fêtes*, school treats, balls, and goodness knows what besides.”

"This has been partially revealed to me already by various portents," remarked Mr. St. John; "but your announcement is of an astounding description. One imbibes some strange hallucination early in life, that the country is a scene of unbroken repose, where people live long lives in total ignorance that such beings as Edgington and Gunter exist; whereas, no later than yesterday, I rode through Otterston, and came upon a bevy of Edgington's men hard at work, putting up a marquee big enough to shelter a regiment; and in the avenue I encountered a loaded van, which was escorted by three or four faces I know only in connexion with *méringues glacées* and lemon ice."

"Oh! yes, the Lorimers are going to do great things," said Sir Frederick, smiling. "They have an annual explosion of this kind; and they discreetly choose this season when nothing is going on, and people are charmed at the prospect of something lively."

"And what is the order of the entertainments?" inquired Miss Vane.

"To-day is the archery *fête*," said Lady Lyle; "and be thankful that it does not look like rain, for last year we had no sooner got there than it poured, not a shower but a deluge; and of course we couldn't shoot, and had to pass the long afternoon in the best manner we could; and it was not lively, I assure you."

"Oh! shall I ever forget it?" said Mrs. Belmont. "The dreadful struggle to be civil and not to yawn, when we were all dying of weariness; and no hope of escape for hours, as our horses were all sent to Grinley."

"I was really sorry for the poor Lorimers," said Lady Lyle; "it must have been very trying to them

to have all their schemes for amusement so completely knocked on the head."

"Foreigners make a point of laughing at us wretched Britons," remarked Mr. St. John, "because the beginning of every conversation with us is weather, the middle weather, and the end weather; but seeing it is our principal stumbling block on every possible occasion, I am afraid the weather must mend its ways before we can."

"And for every thing of an '*al fresco*' description, it is only necessary to fix on a day to ensure its being wet," said Miss Vane; "the gods or goddesses of wind and rain seem to have special objections to picnics."

"Well, they have been propitious to-day," said Lady Lyle; "for here is a morning as if Mrs. Lorimer had been sacrificing on their altars."

"I hope there are no forcible measures adopted to make one shoot," said Mr. St. John plaintively, "because I shall be charmed to look on, but nothing else."

"If you look on, I advise you to stand at a very respectful distance, St. John," said Sir Frederick, laughing; "some of the fair toxophilites are shocking bad shots, and you run a great risk of being transfixed by other darts than those of Cupid."

"You don't say so, Sir Frederick! that is a contingency I had not thought of. I shall certainly keep a field or two off."

"That won't be allowed for one moment," said Lady Lyle, "the idea, Mr. St. John, of such horrid laziness and want of gallantry. If you don't shoot yourself, you shall take my arrows from end to end, and fetch and carry the whole afternoon."

"Good heavens!" replied Mr. St. John with affected

alarm, "pray be merciful in your requirements; and consider what Sir Frederick has just said about bad shots. Only think what you would have to answer for were you to send me back to town a one eyed calendar."

We all laughed; and then Lady Lyle declared we were wasting the whole morning chattering, which would never do, as we had to dress, and to drive six miles, and to be at Otterston at half past twelve.

The Miss Gascoignes belonged to the ranks of the fair toxophilites, and by and by sailed down stairs in voluminous white dresses with a considerable allowance of green about them, and very becoming and coquettish looking hats, with long feathers drooping over their shoulders.

The young ladies were quite conscious of looking well, and offered no objections when Lady Lyle turned them slowly round and round as on a pivot, to see if they were all right, she said.

No doubt existed in the mind of any one present, that they were all right if muslin and crinoline could make them so; but it was wonderful what a deal of arranging their various accoutrements did require. Sir Theodore Anson, Mr. Neville, and my unfortunate self were kept in active employ for more than half an hour in fitting arrows and fastening quivers; now they were too high, now too low; the arrival of the carriages alone closed the scene. All this time Mr. St. John calmly surveyed the proceedings from a deep lounging chair, where he had comfortably ensconced himself; his occupation being that of softly stroking his moustaches, and rolling Psyche about with the points of his tiny glazed boots.

There was some little settling before we started;

and Flora and I finally accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Belmont in their carriage.

This sharp and lively little lady seized on the opportunity to give my sister and myself an outline of the people to whose house we were going; and if her comments on things in general were not very good-natured, they were certainly very amusing, and also I have reason to believe contained in them a good deal of truth.

"The Lorimers of Otterston are not so bad in their way," said Mrs. Belmont; "Mr. Lorimer is simply a pompous old goose whom nobody minds, and who toadies dreadfully to great people; but there is no actual harm in him, or good either for that matter."

I could not help reflecting on the old observation, "I can defend myself from my enemies, but oh! save me from my friends." And when I am in want of a character, it is not to Mrs. Belmont that I shall apply for it.

"His wife is an easy, good-natured woman, with not a bit of authority in her own house, quite ruled by her husband and daughters; but she is a lady-like woman, and is generally very much liked. Then the three daughters are all pretty and pleasant, very lively, and well up to all sorts of things."

"Larky?" I inquired.

"Oh! no; not that at all. I mean that they know how to keep up appearances, and make a small income go the very furthest it can. They are quite poor to be county people in a good position, and of course they can only manage at all by the closest economy; so they never entertain in a regular way, give no dinners, and very seldom have people staying with them."

"Then they compound with their creditors, and

give this annual gathering as a discharge of all their entertaining debts?"

"Exactly; and on the strength of this they go everywhere during the remainder of the year. To-day, as you know, is the archery *fête*, when we meet and are supposed to shoot for some trumpery prizes that don't cost ten shillings, a bog-oak bracelet, or a coloured glass scent bottle, or something equally valuable; after which we go into lunch, and here they really go to a wonderful expense, for they have down some of Gunter's people, and it really is a very swell affair. Then we prowl about the grounds for a time (they are not very extensive, and it is soon done), then tea and coffee in the drawing-room, after which we attempted dancing in the house, but the last two years it was such a miserable crowd that it was impossible to move; so this time they are to have a marquee for the *déjeuner*, which is then to be cleared for dancing."

"And to-morrow?" inquired Flora, "for I understand we return then."

"Oh! to-morrow they do a little mild propriety, and come out in the Lady Bountiful line; have up the school children, and stuff them with buns and weak tea. Then at the conclusion, Mr. Lorimer makes a speech even weaker than the tea, tells them to be good children and do as they are bid, and I think that is about all. Then *we* have what Mr. Lorimer calls a 'Swiss tea,' but I call a 'heavy' one, tea and coffee and all the most presentable *débris* of the *fête*; and positively I think this is the most amusing affair of the two, for they are mostly young people and intimates on this occasion, the elderlies can't stand a second day of no dinner, old gentlemen especially; so we have

much more fun, and we dance again of course, and then the whole thing is over till next year."

"Well! I think it sounds rather pleasant, Mrs. Belmont; something decidedly off the common run of heavy dinner-parties."

"Oh! it is really not bad, and it has some especial recommendations of its own, that have been well considered by the Lorimers. Now only think what a charming opportunity for Miss Louisa Gascoigne to show Mr. Neville how admirably she is adapted for a clergyman's wife! You watch her to-morrow, and you will be amused at the line she will take. The most engaging softness and affability to the 'dear little children'—'Is it not an interesting sight?' and pretty little speeches of that kind. Don't laugh, Miss Nugent, it is truth every word, and I am sure your brother knows it if you don't."

"Really, Mrs. Belmont, you are very severe," said Flora laughing, "and Charley has imbibed quite too many disrespectful notions since he joined the army; don't add to their number."

"He is in very good hands for that sort of thing when he is in the society of Sir Theodore Anson and Mr. St. John," replied Mrs. Belmont; "they won't leave many soft corners in his heart. I am sure the speeches I have heard that conceited Granville St. John bring out in the coolest way, were enough to have tried the patience of a saint, a female one at least. I quite longed to give him a bit of my mind."

"And did you not, Mrs. Belmont?"

"No. I was really afraid," and the little woman laughed. "He has such a horrid way of saying the most odious things in that soft supercilious voice of

his, that I thought it was best not to provoke him. Then it is generally single women that he attacks, so it did not precisely affect my case; I was not sufficiently magnanimous to enter into a crusade against him about people who I dare say deserved a good deal of what he said of them."

"Oh! fie, Mrs. Belmont," said Flora smiling, "I expected better things of you. Now, there is Miss Vane, Charley's friend, she would have no such fear. I think a controversy between them would be very amusing."

"But he is such a lazy creature," replied Mrs. Belmont; "there is no standing that '*dolce far niente*' manner of his, I call it provoking beyond endurance. Nothing puts me into such a passion as a person who can keep their temper quite comfortably, and when you are in a regular fit of rage smiles blandly, and seems to be thoroughly enjoying your worry of mind."

We all laughed, and just at that moment an open carriage whirled rapidly past, containing an elderly gentleman and two ladies, who, from the mere glimpse I could obtain of them, were young and handsome.

"These are the Meredith Lorimers from Malton Grange," said Mrs. Belmont; "a dreadfully stuck-up family, cousins of the Otterston people. Their mother was some City merchant's daughter, rolling in wealth; so Mr. Lorimer put his pride in his pocket as he was much in want of money, and brought home the City heiress to the home of all the Lorimers where it was very much needed; and now they sink the City entirely, and are very great people indeed, and quite patronise their cousins, whose father did not marry a Bloomsbury belle, but the daughter of a landed pro-

prietor who had only fourteen children, and gave them very little besides his blessing."

"So it is a case of blood *versus* money," I remarked.

"Exactly," replied Mrs. Belmont, "and as usual money carries the day. The airs those Meredith Lorimers give themselves are perfectly insupportable; they sail into a room as if they were duchesses, only I never saw a duchess half so scornful; and then they glance about them with an expression in their faces as if they pitied themselves for having to associate with such *canaille*. I am sure nobody wants their company, and they certainly do not trouble people with much of it, for they never unbend unless there are any of their own set in the room; and then they are noisy and ill-bred enough in their own way, and act as if no creature were entitled to any consideration except themselves."

"My dear Mrs. Belmont," said Flora, "you will make me quite afraid of you; I had no idea you were such a sharp observer of human nature."

"Oh! you need not be afraid, I don't mean to flatter you, but you are too much of a lady and too sensible ever to act in this manner. But there are the two Miss Gascoignes now, they are the exact counterparts of the Meredith Lorimers, and just behave in the same exclusive manner. Now to-day those girls will all herd together, looking at everybody else in their supercilious way, and making very rude remarks quite loud enough to be heard; while Lady Lyle is universally admired for her unaffected, pleasant manners; and Lady Julia St. Orme, Lord St. Orme's only daughter, who is a great heiress, and will one day be a viscountess in her own right, goes about among high

and low, with a sweet smile and a kind inquiry for everybody, and is a good deal more thought of than any Gascoigne or Meredith Lorimer will ever be."

A little more conversation of this kind brought us to the gate of Otterston ; but the *fête* and its incidents must be described in another chapter.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ARCHERY FETE.

It was a very pretty sight we came upon, and as the day was remarkably fine it appeared to double advantage.

Otterston had originally been little more than a cottage, but it had been added to on various occasions, and was now a long, low, irregular building, with windows of different sorts and sizes, and a goodly allowance of trellis work and creepers in every possible direction.

The lawn was not extensive, but it was shaven to a velvet pile, and many bright roses and gay early flowers in beds and in pots studded its green surface, though their radiance was partially dimmed by the still gayer hues of silken sheen that fluttered about like large sized butterflies on every side; and enabled the county paper to flourish a long and interesting paragraph, stating that the rank, beauty, and fashion of the neighbourhood were then and there assembled.

Very likely they were too, for there was a wonderful assemblage of fine dresses, and a number of very nice-looking people, both pretty and aristocratic; and everybody seemed to have come for the purpose of doing nothing but enjoying themselves as much as

they could. Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer and their daughters stood in a group to receive and welcome their visitors. They were all very much as Mrs. Belmont had described them; the young ladies bore a strong family resemblance to each other, and were lively and agreeable, no airs about them at any rate.

Their two handsome cousins and the Miss Gascoignes had already joined interests, and had taken up their position on a little rise in the lawn, where they could see everybody, and at the same time be well seen themselves.

They were surrounded by a bevy of gentlemen, including three or four cavalry officers from a neighbouring town, who stood twirling their moustaches and staring about them with the peculiarly bold and at the same time singularly vapid expression characteristic in a general way of the juniors of that arm of the service, a compound of ignorance and arrogance very delightful to see.

The conversational powers of those gentlemen did not appear to be of a very high order, and seemed mostly to consist of very free and easy remarks upon everything and every body, with pleasant little asides among themselves of a very slang and jockeyish description. It seemed, however, to give perfect satisfaction to their fair friends and themselves, and nothing more was apparently expected of them; and it is a great matter now and then to find people who are easily pleased.

Now, I have no wish to be severe, and indeed it would ill become me to be so, seeing that I have the good fortune to be one of the individuals thus especially favoured; but it has often struck me as very surprising the immense amount of very trashy and

totally uninteresting conversation (if it merits the name) that a woman will listen to from an officer of any age or rank ; while she would not be decently civil were the same observations uttered by a civilian, unless, to be sure, he were uncommonly well off.

Take the rawest young ensign that ever was caught, and lead him up to a girl, and she will listen with smiling attention to his most simple remarks, and when the artless youth hangs fire altogether, and is visibly in a state of the most horrid trepidation, see how amiably she will help him out of his difficulties, and appear never to have observed them, which indeed perhaps she has not.

In a general way young officers do not shine in conversation. There are exceptions to this as to every other rule, for there are clever men in the army as elsewhere ; and when a military man is sensible and well-informed, I know no pleasanter member of society. But this usually comes only with years and experience, added to foreign service in different countries ; I am now speaking of the junior officers of a regiment, who have mostly quitted their homes almost before their education was completed, and have had very little opportunity of improvement ever since.

There is no deficiency of words with those young gentlemen, they have plenty to say for themselves in a general way, indeed you occasionally wish some of them rather less fluent in their remarks ; but it is mere surface talk, a lively smatter of everything, in which one or two ideas are made like the gold leaf to cover the total absence of any others. It is amusing enough the merry rattling flow of talk that goes on round a mess-table, where nearly all subjects are discussed in a conventional way that has little real

meaning in it ; for there, as in other places, language is very often employed to conceal the real sentiments.

But after all what have been the staple topics of discourse during several hours which you have passed very agreeably ?

Pipe-clay of course has largely predominated ; you have heard uniforms, mess charges, pay, and allowances discussed with great eagerness, and have been perfectly amazed at the prodigious powers of memory displayed in reference to the exchanges of officers in various regiments ; but after that you can recollect nothing beyond a number of lively observations about nothing very particular, anecdotes of rather a doubtful tendency, and remarks not in the least so. It has all been exceedingly pleasant at the time, and you have enjoyed it amazingly ; but it is a thing for an hour, next day it is all like the “ baseless fabric of a vision, leaving no wreck behind,” except sometimes a very disagreeable reminder in the form of a severe attack of headache and a strong desire for soda-water.

But I see that my old habit of digressing is upon me, and I must return to the gay doings at Otterston, where the chief part of the expected guests having arrived, it is now proposed that the archery should commence without further delay.

A long, narrow field adjoining the lawn is the ground selected ; and here a couple of targets are erected, and every preparation made for a regular match.

The prizes are displayed on a table placed near the seats for elderly spectators ; and they consist of several pretty little trifles of an inexpensive description, fancy inkstands, *papier maché* blotting-books, French fans, and various articles of a similar nature, all quite suffi-

cient for the purpose of creating a harmless rivalry between the fair archers.

I accompanied Sir Frederick Lyle to the scene of action ; and he led me up to a corner of the field, where beneath a sheltering thorn was placed a camp-stool, on which sat a very handsome woman of four or five-and-twenty, quite surrounded by gentlemen, with whom she was conversing in very sweet and languid tones.

She was a bright complexioned blonde, with long drooping curls and very large blue eyes ; and her manner had a charming helplessness and graceful timidity that appeared very fascinating to the whole *cordon* of her admirers.

"This is the widow, Charley," said Sir Frederick in an aside as we approached the circle ; and then going up to her he shook her warmly by the hand, said he was charmed to see her looking so well, and then added, "Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Nugent, Mrs. Langton ; quite a young idea, so I hope you will teach him how to shoot."

The fair widow gave me a graceful bend and a sweet smile, the latter revealing teeth even and white as pearls ; and with a silvery laugh she observed, "I shall be most happy to afford Mr. Nugent any assistance in my power, but I am only a beginner myself, and am trusting to the kindness of my friends to put me in the right way." She glanced round her train of cavaliers with a bewitchingly appealing glance, who all eagerly assured her that they were entirely at her disposal, and that she might depend upon them in every emergency.

The ringing of a little bell now summoned the archers to their post ; and Mrs. Langton rose, gave her shawl to one gentleman and her parasol to another,

and taking the arm of Sir Frederick Lyle, she sauntered up to the target where all were already assembled. Her figure was very tall and graceful, and she had an undulating movement in walking that reminded one of a swan ; all her gestures were soft and rounded, there was nothing in the least awkward or angular about Mrs. Langton.

Lady Julia St. Orme was pointed out to me among the ladies on the ground ; a lady-like, gentle girl, with soft dark eyes, not beautiful, but very interesting in appearance, and quite handsome enough for the greatest heiress among the English nobility, and a future peeress to boot.

As most of my readers have been present at archery *fêtes*, it is needless to describe this one very minutely ; the fair archers did not shoot worse than they usually do, though Mr. St. John afterwards declared that his optics escaped very narrowly on several occasions ; and that at all future exhibitions of the kind he should most decidedly take up his position close to the target, as he had proved to his own satisfaction by a careful mathematical calculation, that that was clearly the safest standing ground, fewer arrows arriving there than at any other place.

As there were no less than twelve prizes, a goodly number of ladies were proclaimed victors ; and among the winners were the eldest Miss Lorimer, Lady Lyle, and my sister Flora ; the chief prize being awarded to Miss Vane, who was decidedly the only respectable shot on the ground.

It seemed to me that the chief end and aim of the whole affair was to promote a little innocent flirtation, for I certainly imagined I traced several highly promising cases. Mrs. Langton in her delightfully help-

less way could do nothing without immense assistance, "some one must show her how to do this;" and "some one must show her how to do that;" half a dozen willing cavaliers were in constant requisition to hold her various belongings; but who would not rapturously devote his energies to her service when such a smile was the reward?

The Misses Gascoigne and Meredith Lorimer copied her in their own way, and received a number of inane sallies from their plunger attendants with apparent gratification. Mr. St. John was certainly considered to be a very knowing hand at a flirtation as at everything else; but I believe in a general way, the principal part of the work was done ready to his hand, he had no trouble in catching his birds, they came even before he called them, and all he had to do was to reciprocate the attentions that were showered upon him. He often declared that women were in nearly all cases the active agents, and men merely the passive; and that it was clearly a work of supererogation making any exertions on one's own account, for he really believed they preferred doing things their own way; and as being saved all extra trouble completely suited his book, he highly approved of the present *régime*.

A vast number of *affaires du cœur* were attributed to him, and many fair women were said to have showered the wealth of their affection on Granville St. John; but no revelations respecting them had ever passed his lips, he was strictly honourable in love, and was not one of those who would kiss and tell.

Many of his friends were surprised at his great success with women, for his manner to them was *insouciant* and careless to a great degree; but there must have been some latent charm behind that in-

different exterior, or perhaps that very impassibility was to some women his greatest attraction. The female mind is a curious contradiction ; and in many cases what would have been deemed sufficient to cure them of the most ardent affection, has only more firmly rivetted their hearts to its object.

This long preamble is submitted to the reader that he or she may be equally astonished with myself, when I saw as I plainly did, that Mr. St. John was evidently attracted by and doing the civil to Miss Vane.

Possibly he may have been amused in the first instance, by the off hand *brusquerie* of her manner, and by the perfectly matter-of-course air with which she received his attentions ; which to the *blasé* and petted Granville St. John, must certainly have had the merit of decided novelty. Besides this, she set herself in opposition to all his pet theories, and contradicted him in a number of uncomplimentary assertions ; and with all this, Mr. St. John had unmistakably taken a fancy to her, and was exerting himself in a manner for him quite unprecedented. Lady Lyle had made a point of introducing him to Mrs. Langton, but that charming personage had failed in her endeavours to attach him to her numerous train ; I judged that she was too much in his own style to suit him, at any rate he completely disregarded her ; and quite impervious to all hints, he offered his arm to Miss Vane, when luncheon was announced to be in readiness. I followed in their wake with little Mrs. Belmont, who had proved a most valuable auxiliary during the afternoon, and had fully informed me about every body and everything.

The *déjeûner* was very lively and pleasant ; constant

popping of corks and rattling of glasses mingled with a never-ceasing flow of animated conversation were heard in every direction ; and bright eyes sparkled all the more brightly for the rapidly circling champagne.

At the conclusion of the entertainment, it was unfortunately deemed necessary to make a few very vapid speeches, which were listened to with praiseworthy patience by the assembled guests ; and then we were left to our own devices until the tent was cleared of the *débris* of the feast, and made ready (to employ the phrase of the penny-a-liners) for the graceful votaries of Terpsichore. What befel some of us during the interval, I shall relate in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MILL RACE.

I SAID in another place, that the Otterston grounds were by no means extensive ; though by a skilful disposition of lawn and shrubbery, they appeared larger than they really were.

The beauty of the pleasure grounds was much enhanced by a broad and rapid river, which flowed past the lawn, and disappeared for a time in the recesses of a thick wood that adjoined the plantations of Otterston ; from which it afterwards emerged to form the principal feature of a very rich and smiling English landscape. The company generally were scattered about the garden and shrubbery, and many were wandering along the banks of the river ; while some few, in most cases couples, had quietly disappeared in some of the many winding walks that looked very tempting for exploration ; among those were Miss Vane and Mr. St. John.

I was one of a party which included Mrs. Belmont, Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle, Mr. Felix Neville, and my two sisters ; and we had proceeded some little distance along the banks of the stream, and were meditating a return homewards, when we heard voices calling to us, and on looking up, we saw Miss Vane

and Mr. St. John standing on a high projecting bank overhanging the water.

Miss Vane was waving her handkerchief as a signal to us ; and at the moment we caught sight of her, the earth on which she stood crumbled beneath her weight, she slipped from her position, and making a violent effort to recover herself, lost her balance completely, and fell into the river which was at that place very deep and impetuous.

The whole thing occurred in a couple of seconds.

A heartrending scream burst from the horrified ladies ; but almost before we could realize what had happened, Granville St. John had rushed down the bank, thrown off his coat and waistcoat, and dashed into the water, where with a few vigorous strokes he rapidly gained on the drowning girl, and seized her firmly with one hand, while with the other he kept himself above water.

I must explain that the banks of the stream were here very precipitous, and it was necessary to follow a winding path to reach the spot where the accident had occurred ; though we could see everything quite distinctly from the place where we were standing.

I only waited a few moments till I saw that Miss Vane was in comparative safety ; and then I ran up the path to join them on the other side of the projecting bank, and be at hand to assist them when Mr. St. John should reach the edge of the stream.

But when I once more came in sight of them, things were very different from what I had expected. Mr. St. John was still in the middle of the river ; but the great strength of the current had carried him a considerable way further down, and I now became alarmed that his strength would fail him before he could reach

the bank. He was firmly supporting Miss Vane, and endeavouring as much as possible to keep her head above water; but she appeared perfectly senseless, and it must have been a prodigious exertion to bear her weight, and maintain a struggle with the overwhelming force of the current. I called out loudly, that he might know assistance was close at hand; and rushing frantically along the river side, tearing off my clothes as I ran, I was just about to plunge into the water and swim to their aid, when my name loudly uttered in a thrilling accent by Mrs. Belmont arrested my attention for a moment.

"The mill race, the mill race!" she almost shrieked, waving her hand towards a small building some little way in advance. In a moment I comprehended the appalling fate that awaited my two unfortunate companions, unless by a merciful interposition of providence, they were snatched from a death too frightful to contemplate.

I signed that I understood her, and again dashed on; but now with a sickening feeling at my heart that seemed almost to stop its pulsations, for the river had here acquired an impetuosity before which the strongest swimmer must have been powerless; and the glance of an instant told me that by attempting to join them I should only share their fate without being able to do them the very slightest good.

In an agony I cannot describe I watched their rapid progress; but a thought flashed into my mind, and quick as lightning I acted upon it.

The mill stood close to the bank, and a little before reaching it the river narrowed considerably, and was still more confined by a wall which sent the whole volume of water into the mill race. This was situated

nearly in the middle of the stream, and except from the interior of the mill could only be approached by a narrow plank apparently connected with the machinery. It looked very rotten and insecure, and was so narrow that I thought it scarcely possible I could preserve my footing; a moment's hesitation, the faintest loss of balance, and I should instantaneously be plunged into the seething waters below.

But what would not I have dared to save those two helpless beings from so horrible a fate as awaited them, if they were sucked into the stream that fed the huge mill-wheel, the dull roar of which I could plainly hear even above the rushing noise of the agitated waters.

Not a moment was to be lost. Once across the plank I was in safety, for there was firm footing on the opposite side; so holding my breath and setting my teeth firmly, I summoned all my resolution to my aid, and endeavouring to see nothing but the board on which my foot rested, I stepped firmly and quickly across, and immediately reached a place of security.

Instantly throwing myself flat on the ground, I stretched as far as possible across the millrace, holding the railing with one hand to enable me to preserve my balance; and in breathless expectation I awaited the moment when the current might possibly bring Mr. St. John within reach of my grasp.

They swiftly approached; Mr. St. John pale as death, his eyes almost starting from his head, but still bravely supporting his lifeless companion. Despair was written on his features, for he clearly perceived the danger of their position.

Nearer and nearer they came, my heart almost stopped—"Hold her fast, and try and reach me!" I shouted hoarsely. The rapid water gave a tremendous

swirl at the moment, I swung myself over and made a frantic clutch at them as they were hurried past. I could not see, for millions of specks were before my eyes, but I *felt* that I grasped something,—that something was Lucile Vane's silk dress,—for the moment they were saved. Another second and Mr. St. John seized my arm, but the water had a strength superior to ours, and from my position I had very little power, and could not long have maintained my hold.

But friendly voices sounded in my ears, assistance was close at hand ; in another moment Felix Neville had likewise crossed the perilous plank, and his arms aided mine in drawing the senseless girl and her almost fainting preserver to the edge of the gangway where we stood ; a second or two more and they were both raised from the water and placed in safety beside us.

Mr. St. John was completely exhausted ; he gasped for some minutes in a manner distressing to witness, and pressed his hand to his side as if he were in great pain ; and now thoroughly worn out by the arduous struggle, and deprived of the excitement which alone had kept him up, overtasked nature gave way, and he closed his eyes in a heavy and death-like faint. Lucile Vane lay beside him, even more ghastly and corpse-like, and on examining her I feared Mr. St. John's gallant efforts to preserve her life had been all in vain.

She remained perfectly still and motionless, her features wan and rigid, her eyes firmly closed in what looked like their long last sleep, the water streaming from every part of her dress, and forming a pool around her. By this time the rest of our party had come up, and had alarmed the people of the mill, who opened the door of communication with the interior,

and joined us on the wooden platform, lost in horrified amazement at what might have taken place.

Mr. Neville and I tenderly lifted the dripping form of Lucile Vane, and carried her into the kitchen of the mill, where she was placed in front of the fire, and every attention anxiously bestowed upon her. Messengers were immediately sent off for the nearest medical man, but everything that could be thought of was done in the meantime. Mr. St. John soon recovered beneath the proper remedies, but he was entirely prostrated for the time; indeed, I should never have imagined him capable of the immense exertion he had gone through, for he had by no means a muscular frame, and his usual inactivity did not lead one to suppose that he possessed so much energy and endurance.

He signed to me to come over to where he was lying, and taking my hand in his he pressed it warmly, and said in a low tone, with much emotion, "My dear Nugent, I am not a man of many words, but I shall never forget what you have done for me this day. I owe my life to your presence of mind, and I hope to remember my debt."

"I am only thankful the idea of trying what I did occurred to me," I replied, "But really we should have been in a bad way had not Mr. Neville appeared at the instant he did; your thanks are equally due to him."

Mr. St. John began gracefully to express his gratitude, but the young clergyman gravely motioned him to silence, and said in a serious and impressive manner, "My share in aiding you was very trifling indeed, Mr. St. John, your *human* preserver was Mr. Nugent; but there is One to whom far deeper

gratitude is due, the Almighty Protector who watched over you in the hour of your great peril, and but for whose divine permission you would not now be in this world."

It was the "word in season," and we all felt it so.

Mr. Neville's manner was dignified and solemn without being in the least overstrained; we all respected it, and were silent for a few minutes; from that moment he rose immensely in my opinion, for I saw that in spite of a little ecclesiastical foppery, and some high-flown notions about church matters, there was that in this young man that would eventually lead him to great and good things.

He had evidently no wish to be obtrusive in his remarks, for he almost immediately busied himself in helping the progress of some remedy that was to be tried on Miss Vane, who still lay in the kitchen in the same death-like condition, Lady Lyle and my sisters remaining beside her, while Mrs. Belmont and Sir Frederick had gone to Otterston in search of restoratives.

What a change was all this from the gaiety and thoughtless enjoyment of scarcely an hour before.

One of those careless pleasure-seekers had been snatched from the very jaws of death; another was hovering on the confines of life, if indeed she had not already passed them. How little do we know what one hour may bring forth! In a short time we heard the welcome announcement of the arrival of the doctor, and with extreme anxiety we awaited his verdict.

She lived—there was just a glimmer of hope, no more; her life hung on a feeble thread which any moment might snap.

Every remedy that could be devised was employed,

but a faint flutter at the heart was the only sign that she was still in existence; my sisters clasped her cold hands in their warm ones, Lady Lyle, her eyes hazy with tears, bent over that pallid face, and strove to discover if the slightest dulness marked the clear surface of the little mirror held before her mouth.

Half an hour—an hour passed, and their exertions were still unrewarded; the doctor looked grave, and Lady Lyle wept and wrung her hands.

“Her poor father and mother, so wrapped up in her! Oh! what shall we do! If only her aunt had been here.”

I may mention that Miss Leeson had not joined the party to Otterston, but had preferred remaining behind, being too old for those things, she said.

All hope was almost abandoned, and the doctor himself shook his head, when one of Lucile's hands, held by my sister Annie, gave a convulsive twitch, and instantly afterwards her eyelids trembled violently.

Restoratives were applied more eagerly than ever, and in a few minutes more they were successful.

Miss Vane sighed heavily two or three times, her limbs were rapidly convulsed, she then gasped hard and seemed to struggle for breath, and finally her eyes opened, and she gazed dreamily around her. For some time she remained in a very confused state, and seemed quite unaware of all that had happened to her; but her gradual restoration might now confidently be looked for; our 'minds were now relieved from the terrible dread that had weighed upon them.

In the meantime, the accident and its consequences had created an immense sensation and alarm at Otterston; and the Lorimers and many of their guests had hastened down to the mill to offer assist-

ance of every kind, and inquire into the full particulars of the affair.

Mrs. Lorimer wished Miss Vane to be at once taken to the house, where more comforts could be at her disposal than were now possible ; and as the mill was not just the most desirable abode for her in her present state, the doctor advised her removal whenever she should be able to venture on the exertion.

A carriage was sent down for her, and she was closely wrapped up in blankets and carried into it, Lady Lyle accompanying her to Otterston.

Of course all this confusion and excitement had somewhat altered the character of the *fête*; and for some time people wandered about in groups, hesitating as to whether they had not better order their carriages and disperse at once. But in the midst of their uncertainty Lady Lyle came down stairs, once more with her bright smile and cheery manner ; and she said that Miss Vane was perfectly recovered, quite herself again, and was much distressed by the idea that this unfortunate *contretemps* had cast a damp on the gaiety of the meeting.

“ We shall just return at once to Egerton, she and I,” continued Lady Lyle ; “ it will be the best plan, for she would scarcely be able to appear again this evening, and I shall go with her to explain matters to her aunt. Now, I hope my dear Mrs. Lorimer, that we shall prove no further check to your amusement, for all’s well that ends well, and we have fortunately escaped with a fright and a wetting. Miss Vane begged me to thank everybody for their kind interest in her accident, and she hoped no one would think any more about it.”

Mrs. Lorimer pressed her very much to remain at

Otterston with Miss Vane, as she did not think her sufficiently well for so long a drive.

"It is only six miles," replied Lady Lyle, "a mere nothing; and she is really quite recovered now, or I would not sanction the plan. Besides she is anxious to be the first to tell it to her aunt; only think if the poor lady heard some incorrect version of it—news of that kind flies very fast."

So it was agreed that they should take their departure, and that everything should go on as before arranged.

"Charley," said Lady Lyle, in a low tone as she passed me, "come with me. Miss Vane wishes to see you for a few minutes."

"Is she really better?" I inquired.

"Yes, really. She is a wonderful girl, and I hope she is not doing too much; but she is in a fever to be off, for she is much distressed at all the fuss she has caused, and would not rest till I promised to implore everybody not to mind her but to go on with their amusement. Indeed, I am vexed myself that we have put the Lorimers about so much, but it could not be helped. Things will go wrong occasionally in this world. But, Charley, I have scarcely spoken to you yet. What a little hero you have been! Granville St. John, too. I am quite proud of you both."

"Well, I hope any one else would have done the same," I replied; "but I don't deny that I am glad of my share in it, it is a very pleasant feeling saving life."

"I can't think of it yet without shuddering. Such a fearful death—it is too horrible to realize! Oh! Charley, how happy you must feel. Whatever put the idea into your head?"

"A story I once read just flashed into my mind. A man carried away by the current in the same way as they were; he knew his only chance was to make a desperate clutch at the woodwork as he passed, and he succeeded, but the fastenings gave way partially, and he was saved by the mill people at the very instant they broke entirely. That story quite fascinated me, I recollect; but I never expected to make a practical application of it."

"Well, you have certainly done so in a most wonderful manner. Stop, this is Miss Vane's door; I will go in first and tell her you are here."

She left me, and presently re-appeared, bidding me come in.

It was a very comfortable dressing-room, and they had lighted a fire in it. A sofa was drawn beside the fire, and Lucile Vane sat there in a long white pegoir with which one of the Miss Lorimers had accommodated her. She was still very pale, all but a bright spot on her cheeks, and her eyes always sparkling were now quite unnaturally so. I did not like her appearance at all. She held out her hand to me as I entered, but did not utter a word.

"I shall take myself off till you have made all your pretty speeches!" said Lady Lyle. "Ten minutes you shall have, no longer; I shall then come and carry you off, Charley." And she left the room as she spoke.

I took Miss Vane's offered hand, and sat down on the sofa beside her. She held mine in both hers, and trembled so violently that for some moments she could not speak.

"You are not well yet, Miss Vane," I said; "I am

sure you are doing too much. Do be persuaded to keep quiet for a little."

"No, no," she replied, "let me get home to Egerton at least. I may be wrong, but I feel as if I were going to be ill;" and she hurriedly pressed her hand to her forehead. "I quite dread remaining here, and I should not mind it half so much with dear, kind Lady Lyle."

"There you are right," I said, "but are you really equal to the effort?"

"Indeed I am quite;" and she laughed in a nervous manner very unlike herself. "I really feel perfectly well, and could almost have joined the party again to prove it; but I could not pass the evening of the day in which I have escaped so fearful a death in a careless manner. Oh! Mr. Nugent, I cannot say what I wish to you, my heart is too full: I can feel it, but I cannot express it, words are too cold."

She burst into tears as she spoke, and trembled so much that I became uneasy.

"Dear Miss Vane," I replied, endeavouring to soothe her, "say no more about it, try even not to think of it till you are stronger. Will you do this to please me?"

"I will if you wish it," she replied still sobbing, "but do not think me ungrateful, for I am not."

"You think only too much of it, and it is bad for you to agitate yourself in this manner. When you are quite well you shall speak of it, not till then."

"Very well," she replied with a faint smile. "But I could not leave till I had spoken to Mr. St. John and yourself, it would have worried me more than anything had I not done so; for oh! what do I not

owe you both!" She was getting excited again, and I rejoiced to hear Lady Lyle's foot in the corridor.

"The carriage is all ready my dear," she said in a cheerful voice after glancing at Lucile, "We shall get you nicely down the back staircase, and you will meet nobody. I have made your apologies to Mrs. Lorimer and her daughters, and begged them not to attempt to see you before you left. You shall call some day soon."

Mrs. Lorimer's maid produced all sorts of comfortable coverings, and I gave Lucile my arm down the staircase, and assisted her into a close carriage which stood at the back entrance. She pressed my hand and gave me a wistful look as she sank back on the cushions, and I watched her and Lady Lyle drive off with a strong feeling of uneasiness in my mind that all was not yet as it should be.

I returned to the assembled company, but the character of the *fête* was completely changed in my eyes; my feelings had been too highly excited during the last few hours for them all at once to resume their customary composure.

So I was very glad when my sisters came and begged me to urge Sir Frederick to leave Otterston with them as soon as he could do so without offending Mrs. Lorimer, as they like myself had no desire to remain longer. He at once acceded to their request, saying he had stayed behind principally on their account, and would return as soon as the carriage could be got ready, leaving his other guests to follow at their leisure.

Granville St. John overheard our proposition, and begged to be included in the party. He was sauntering about in his usual indifferent, tired-of-everything

manner, and having an immense horror of anything like a fuss, he always bolted whenever the topic of the accident came on the *tapis*.

The Lorimer and Gascoigne set were very desirous of petting us both, and making a species of lions of us; and I was excessively amused by his great annoyance at each fresh attack, and his positive declaration that he had done nothing in the wide world, would they only leave him alone?

"Mercy on us all!" he exclaimed to me, privately, venting his indignation in a gesture expressive of great disgust, "what are men supposed to have come to now-a-days, if the mere act of jumping into the water to save an unfortunate girl is considered remarkable? I can swim quite well, and ran no risk whatever, only for the current, on which I had not calculated. Now, *you did* something worth speaking about—now just allow me to finish my sentence; I don't often make long speeches, but when I do, I have a fancy for concluding them. You had both great courage and great presence of mind, two qualities not often united, especially in any one so young as you are; not one person in five thousand would have thought of doing what you did; the very imminence of the danger would have paralysed their faculties. You will make a good soldier, Nugent; plenty of the right stuff about you."

"I am glad you think so," I replied, "for I have an ambition to distinguish myself some day or other; only there is never any fighting now; peace and plenty the order of the day."

"Oh! take my word you will have lots before you are done with it. Sufficient for the day is the fighting thereof; when it does come—regular campaigning, I mean—you won't be in such a hurry for a repetition

of the dose. Now I think it is about time we were beating a retreat, the carriage must be ready, I fancy. Where are your sisters?"

We returned to Egerton, and found Miss Vane had retired, feeling very much worn out. Lady Lyle said she was very anxious about her, for her hands were burning and her pulse alarmingly quick.

The next morning realised all our fears; she was in a raging fever, frenzied with delirium, and her screams were heard all over the house. Egerton was no place for visitors now, and all left at once with the exception of Mr. Neville and ourselves.

My sisters would not hear of quitting Lady Lyle in her present state of anxiety and distress, and begged she would allow them to remain and be of any possible assistance.

She was very glad to have them, and they really were a considerable comfort to her, for they walked and talked with Sir Frederick, kept Fred and Willy quiet, and were ready and willing to do anything that might come in their way.

In my way I did my best, too, and when Lady Lyle grew very despondent, I tried to cheer her up; and once more my pencil and paper were in active requisition, and many half hours did I spend, with a little boy on each side of me, drawing on my imagination for every extraordinary object that earth, air, fire, or water could possibly furnish.

Mr. Neville was always in the way when he was wanted, and never in the way when he was not. Now that we were almost a family circle, and all more closely linked by our one mutual anxiety, this young man came out in a new and pleasant light, and was a great comfort to us all. He was very gentlemanly

and well-informed, and as he had gradually ceased from all his peculiar observations on ecclesiastical topics, receiving no encouragement from any of us to dilate upon them, he had resumed a frank and natural manner, and was a great favourite with all of us.

Many days passed, and Lucile Vane again trod the dark valley of the Shadow of Death, her life for long hung trembling in the balance. Her parents had been sent for, as a fatal result to her illness seemed only too probable; and each day, nay each hour, brought tidings more and more disheartening.

She knew no one, was almost constantly delirious, wasted to a living shadow, and all her long beautiful hair had been cut off, that ice might be applied to her fevered brain.

But youth and a good constitution carried the day; and after more than a week of despair the doctor admitted a ray of hope. Each day it grew stronger, and soon we learnt with the most sincere joy that all danger was now at an end.

We left her gradually recovering; but although our visit to Egerton had been prolonged very much beyond our original intentions, our return home was hastened by a circumstance of which I shall now inform the reader.

Brothers certainly are very blind in matters of this kind, and yet I flatter myself I am not less wide-awake than most people.

I could not conceive the reason why my sister Annie kept lingering in my room one night, she had affected to want a light or something of that kind; and now she fidgetted about my writing table, took up and laid down pens, and utterly disregarded a very

tremendous yawn, and my not very polite hint that I was desperately sleepy.

"Well I won't keep you long, Charley; but I have something to say to you."

"Say away," I replied. "What is it?"

"How stupid you are, Charley! can't you form any idea what it is?"

"Not a grain or a vestige, but it must be something awful by this preamble. Out with it, I'm getting nervous."

"You goose!"

"Complimentary, but I suppose that is not what you came to tell me."

"Not exactly. Well, Charley, you see—Mr. Neville....."

"Oh! the murder's out! You've been and gone and fallen in love with the parson."

"We'll put it the other way," said Annie laughing and blushing; "and suppose that the parson as you call him has fallen in love with me."

"Well it's all one, and as Barry would say, 'What's the odds so long as you're happy.' So you have only got to bring in your ecclesiastic, pop down on your knees, and I'll extend my hands so—like stage fathers—and say, 'Bless ye, my children.'"

"How can you be so absurd, Charley. And only to fancy that you had no suspicion of it. Why Flora guessed it all along."

"She did, did she?" Well you are a nice couple of meek and innocent young ladies, to go and hatch a scheme of this kind under the very nose of your lawful guardian; for of course I am acting as your parent just now."

Annie laughed. "Of course I thought you would

see it, and Mr. Neville only spoke to me to-day, so I could not tell you any sooner."

"What a jolly sell it will be for Miss Gascoigne!" I observed. "She won't bless you when she hears it."

"I am afraid not. But, Charley, do you think papa will consent? He has never seen Mr. Neville, you know."

"But I suppose he can go over to Langley on view. You can trot him out to the best advantage! I'll speak a good word for him, for he is not a bad fellow, and has improved immensely lately, under your tuition very likely."

"I am glad you like him, and he is very partial to you. He says very flattering things of you, Charley."

"Very civil of him; he is on his good behaviour I see. But you have not told me how you like him yourself. Desperately spooney, eh?"

"Don't ask impertinent questions. I am going to marry him, and that's enough."

"Quite enough indeed; I hope Mr. Neville won't find it too much. By the by he is well off, I believe, and all that sort of thing?"

"I don't know. I never asked him; but he would not think of marrying unless he could afford it."

"A good many people do all the same, who can very ill afford it; but I believe Mr. Neville is all right in that respect."

"Well, good night, Charley, I won't detain you any longer."

"Good night, Annie, don't let the parson get into your dreams more than you can help."

"You silly boy!" Exit Annie.

We remained only another day at Egerton, and went home the following one.

My father and mother were certainly not a little surprised at Annie's announcement; but I suppose they had not calculated on keeping their daughters with them for ever, and from all they heard of their intended son-in-law, he was by no means an objectionable character; so Annie was instructed to give him a polite invitation to Langley Park, as soon as was agreeable to himself.

This appeared to be very soon indeed, for the young gentleman came over next day, and made a very excellent impression on the authorities; a financial interview with my father seemed to be of a highly satisfactory nature to all parties, and presently every one was aware that Annie was "an engaged young lady."

The marriage, I understood, was not to **take place** till the autumn, as Annie and her intended had certainly not had the advantage of a long acquaintance; and I also heard that Mr. Neville's mother and sister were to receive an invitation to pay a visit at Langley Park, that the future relations might have an opportunity of becoming known to each other.

I had written for and obtained a fortnight's extension of leave; but one morning on descending to breakfast, I saw by my plate a large and official-looking letter, with the ominous "On Her Majesty's Service" upon it.

I was suddenly recalled for the present, some inspections were coming on, the commanding-general had announced a visit, and all officers must be at their posts; so the adjutant had written desiring me to join as soon as I could.

No help for it, go I must; so I commenced preparations accordingly, and that very afternoon saw me once more on my way to join the 144th at A—— barracks.

CHAPTER XIX.

NELLY O'BRIEN.

IT was a horrid wet day.

One of those days you often have in winter, but seldom at any other season.

It was cold, it was raw, it was miserable ; you shivered as you stood by the warm fire, and rubbed your hands at the bright blaze ; and you shuddered as you looked out at the damp, misty atmosphere, and heard the gusts of rain and sleet drive against the windows.

It was really not a nice day at all ; and it required all the comfort of our luxurious carriage with its soft cushions and closely fitting windows to keep me from grumbling when I set out for the railway station.

John and Flora accompanied me, and Flora grievously deplored the shocking day I had for my journey. By and by the reader shall know why I dwell so particularly on the weather.

We were just in time, and after hurried good-byes I jumped into the nearest carriage, and found my fellow-travellers to consist of a thin elderly gentleman and two stout elderly ladies.

Nothing very promising about them, so I pulled out *Punch* from my travelling bag, and stuck to my

studies for nearly an hour. It was an express train, and we stopped then for the first time. Several passengers rushed rapidly into different carriages, for it was no day to remain out of shelter a moment longer than you could help. A gentleman holding an umbrella over a lady touched the guard's arm.

"Where there are ladies," I heard him say.

"Here sir," replied the guard, throwing open our door, and letting in a dreadful gust of cold raw air; "ladies here, sir."

He evidently thought the two stout parties first-rate protection for anybody.

The lady was helped in by her companion, and she took the seat next the door.

"Now then, sir," said the guard.

"Good bye, Miss Ellen; you will let us know of your arrival and how you are getting on."

"Oh! yes I will. Good bye! many, many thanks." And the door was shut forthwith, and the train again in motion.

This party was young at any rate; I could see that though she had a pretty thick veil on; and she was called Ellen. I always liked the name of Ellen.

She was poor I could see, for her deep mourning had the rusty look peculiar to shabby black, and her gloves were well worn and had been a good deal mended; but the hands they covered were very small and prettily shaped. I was sure she was a lady.

She lay silently back in her corner, never once lifting her veil; and another half hour passed.

Then we stopped again, and had to wait ten minutes, so most of the passengers got out and walked about the station, which was a covered one. The elderly trio alighted, and evidently did not intend

returning, for they took an amazing quantity of traps with them. I got out too, but the young lady never moved.

Even walking about did not warm me much, and I thought after all the carriage was the best place, so I prowled along the train to discover which was my own particular locality.

The young lady was still in her corner, but she did not observe my approach, for her handkerchief was pressed to her eyes and she was sobbing very bitterly. I did not like to intrude on her grief, and was turning away as quickly as possible, when she murmured the words "Alone! alone!" in a tone of the deepest anguish, and removing her hand from her eyes saw me at the step of the carriage.

Her veil was up, and oh! what a charming face she had, though the traces of tears were still upon it, and her eyes were dimmed with weeping.

She started and coloured painfully when she perceived me, and hastily pulling down her veil she threw herself back as far as possible, and turned away her head.

I hesitated for a few moments as to what I had better do, but the guard came out almost immediately and said it was time to take our places, so I entered the carriage and closed the door, and it so happened that no other passengers came to disturb our *tête-à-tête*.

For some little time I looked studiously out of the opposite window; but by and by I thought it was very unkind in me not to take some interest in a fellow traveller in distress, besides I was really curious to know if her grief were at all abated. So I pretended to be fumbling among my things, not to annoy her by an evident scrutiny; but I looked out of the

tail of my eye, as they say, and there was the poor thing crying still, but so quietly and unobtrusively that it was only by her tears dropping fast on her hand that I became aware of the fact.

This would never do at all ; and I felt that if I died for it I must say something in the way of consolation.

I knew it was best not to think over the proper thing to say, for you always make a mull of it when you do that. So I began at once ; feeling all the time that it was a very impudent thing on my part.

"Pray do not think me very impertinent, but I cannot see you in such distress and remain unmoved. If I could only help you."

I suppose there must have been some of the sincerity in my tone that I really felt in my heart, for the young lady sobbed for a few moments, and then said in a low, sweet voice with just a taste of the brogue—

"Thank you. You are very kind, but I have a heavy heart, and cannot bear up as I ought. I know it is very foolish," and here she cried again.

"No, it is not foolish at all," I replied earnestly ; "but I am very sorry you have such grief to bear ; you are too young too."

She shook her head sadly.

"I could not avoid over-hearing you when I came up," I said, "and I heard you say that you felt alone. At your age can that be possible ? If so, that is very sad."

"Yes," she replied, "I am alone in the world. I had no near relation except my father, and I have lost him." And the poor thing wept very, very bitterly.

I waited a few minutes, and then I went at it again. She *was* so pretty, and had such a heavenly voice.

"But you have friends? That gentleman who accompanied you to the station?"

"He was merely my poor father's man of business, but he has been very kind to me, kinder than I had any reason to expect. He is the only friend I have now; once I had plenty, but they were summer friends and are all fled now."

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am for you," I replied. "I understand it all. You have experienced a reverse of fortune, and feel that the world has not been kind to you."

"I am an orphan, friendless, and very poor. I am going to be a governess; and now you know my story."

Her forlorn tones went to my heart. A governess! That lovely creature!

"You a governess!" I said. "It is not possible. Could none of your former friends assist you? Surely some of them must have had kind hearts. Perhaps they do not know your position?"

She softly raised her veil, and she looked at me for a minute with her true, innocent eyes, that seemed to read my very soul.

"I can trust you," she said; "it seems strange to me that in you whom I have only seen for an hour I feel as if I had a friend. But you look true, and ah! I am a better judge of character than I once was."

"You do me justice," I replied, "for I think you may safely trust me; and I should wish to be your friend if you will let me."

"You are young too," she replied, "you must be about my own age."

"I am nearly nineteen," I replied.

"I am two months past it, so I am older than you. Have you any sisters?"

"Yes, I have two."

"Ah! you are well off. I never had any sisters, but I had a brother, a dear, dear brother."

"Is he dead too?" I softly inquired.

"Yes, he was drowned three years ago; such a generous, noble fellow, my own dear Ulick. He was a sailor, and the ship struck on a rock, and he might have saved himself, for he was a beautiful swimmer; but there were women and children on board, and even after he had helped numbers of them he would still see everybody into the boats. He stuck by his captain to the last; and just when they were going to start the ship sunk, and they were both drawn in by the waves, and both drowned."

"It was very noble of him. You have that satisfaction even in mourning his death."

"Yes, I have; but oh! if Ulick had been alive, I should not have been alone now. We were so fond of each other. When I heard of his death all joy in life seemed gone for ever."

"Poor thing!" I said in a pitying voice, "you have had many trials; but I trust a happy future is in store for you yet. Remember how young you are. Time will soften your grief, and long years of happiness may lie before you."

"Or of misery," she replied, "which is more probable."

"No," I said, "do not think so. But I wish you were not going to be a governess. You are not at all suited for it. It is a trying life."

"I know it, and I have not the gentleness and patience necessary to get on well. I have a proud,

quick temper, my spirit is not broken yet, but that will come by and by."

"I hope not," I replied, "for that could only happen with unkind treatment, which I am sure you will never meet with."

"You think so," she said, "ah! I know better. I shall be very unhappy at first, because my heart will rise at coldness and contempt; I shall not be steeled to bear everything for a long time."

"Are you on your way now?" I inquired.

"Yes. I am going to A——."

"To A——!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, do you know it at all?"

"Very well," I replied. "May I ask the name of the family to whom you are going?"

"Jennings, and they live at a place four miles from A——, called Hawksley. Do you know them?"

"I never was at Hawksley, but I have often met and spoken to Mrs. Jennings and her daughters; there are two grown up."

"Then there are three still in the schoolroom, quite young, I believe. These are to be my pupils."

"Good gracious!" I mentally reflected, "I do trust they are not like their sisters;" for I had no fancy for the two visiting Miss Jennings, who were proud, disagreeable girls in a general way, though like many young ladies they could be very civil and amiable when they pleased. They were after the model of the Gascoignes and Meredith Lorimers.

"I am afraid you do not like them much," she said, looking at me inquiringly; "I can read it in your countenance."

"I know very little of them," I replied, "and it is scarcely fair in me to pronounce an opinion. They

may be better than they get the credit of being, we will hope for the best ; but it is not the family I could have wished you to join."

" Ah ! " she said, " it makes little difference ; it would be much the same anywhere."

" Indeed you are much mistaken," I replied. " There are some families where I am sure the governess may be very happy ; I know it was so with us."

" Yes, I can believe it, if your sisters are as kind-hearted as you. But you are the exceptions, not the rule."

" Well, my sisters are very warm-hearted ; I will allow that. Their governess was to them a friend, almost an elder sister ; and they were most deeply attached to her. She was ten years with them, and was, I do believe, as happy as any one in her situation could possibly be, for she had the love and esteem of every one in the house."

" And where is she now ?"

" She was engaged to a young man, tutor in a family where she was first a governess. They waited all the ten years patiently and faithfully ; then my father exerted his interest and procured a small living for him, and they were married from our house ; my father giving her away, and my sisters being her bridesmaids. Now they are as happy as turtle doves."

" Ah ! that may be called ' The Romance of a Governess.' There are few, few cases in the world like that."

" Many, believe me," I replied ; " surely you have not imbibed so very terrible an opinion of mankind

generally, or rather of womankind, for you have more to do with them."

"Indeed I have, and not undeservedly so. Should you care to know my history? I will tell it you if you like."

"I should like it very much, but did not dare to ask you. But first tell me what I am to call you. I only know that your name is Ellen. I heard the friend who came with you call you that."

"My name is O'Brien," she said. "Nelly O'Brien. Only people I did not care for much called me Ellen. Poor papa and my dear Ulick always called me Nelly, and I like it best. It seems to remind me of happy days in dear old Ireland."

"Then you are Irish?" I inquired.

"Yes," she replied. "Did you not guess it by my voice? I know I speak with the brogue."

"Just the most charming little taste in life. I like it so much."

"Do you?" she innocently replied; then like a sweet April morning she half smiled through her tears, and said—

"Fortunately for me, Mrs. Jennings did not put at the close of her application for a governess what they say about cooks and housemaids, 'no Irish need apply.'"

Then she told me all her life with that same delicious Irish accent: what a perfect thing it was! how should I ever be able to endure Barry's frightful patois again?

The way she said "Ah!" was worth going fifty miles to hear; and was as different from the genuinely Milesian "Ach!" of my jovial brother sub, as if they

could not even be supposed to have the most distant similarity in meaning.

Her father had been a colonel in the army, her mother died at the birth of her second child; and the two infants were chiefly brought up by a faithful English nurse, who was their mother's maid. They all lived in a lonely Irish castle, and the children had no companions but each other.

When Ulick was fourteen, and Ellen a year younger, Colonel O'Brien married again; a gay, fashionable London wife, very handsome, and very careless and extravagant.

She was not an unkind step-mother, and rather petted her two wild Irish step-children; but she saw that Ellen was dreadfully uncultivated, and persuaded her father to send her to a first rate school in Paris. Before this, however, she had made a trial of her husband's Irish home; but even while the house was crowded with guests, and every pains and expense lavished in its adornment, she declared she could not live in such a desert; and insisted that they should accompany Ellen to Paris, and take up their abode there. A brave and generous hearted brother of Mrs. O'Brien's had been paying her a long visit in her new home. He was a captain in the navy, and his wild and reckless sea stories completely captivated the imagination of Ulick, and made him long to enter the same service.

Colonel O'Brien consented to it; and the boy was appointed to the same ship as his friend, and accompanied him on his next voyage, which lasted for three years.

During all this time, Colonel and Mrs. O'Brien remained abroad; sometimes in Paris, sometimes travelling, with occasional visits to London.

Ellen continued at school, but when her parents were in Paris, she was very much with them; and young as she was, she went a good deal into society.

At the end of three years, there came a crash.

Colonel and Mrs. O'Brien had been living all along in a style of the most reckless profusion; not caring how the money was procured, so long as it was forthcoming whenever it was required.

They had disregarded all the warnings of their agent, when he wrote to implore more moderation in their demands; and the evil day had at last come upon them, and could no longer be deferred.

Violent recriminations ensued between the husband and wife. He with justice traced his misfortunes from his marriage; and she angrily and bitterly retorted.

After one frightful scene, more violent than any that had previously taken place, Mrs. O'Brien quitted her home; and the partner of her flight was a French count of low and dissipated habits, with whom Colonel O'Brien had very frequently objected to her intimacy. They went to America; and Colonel O'Brien ruined and broken-hearted, returned to England with his daughter. He procured a divorce, and then settled in Ireland, where Nelly and he lived in the most secluded manner; indeed they had scarcely any neighbours.

At the end of three years, Ulick came home; a fine, open hearted young fellow, the pride of his father, and the darling of his sister's heart.

He could not bear to see his young and lovely sister so completely buried beyond the reach of all society; and during eighteen months that he remained with them, they led a more cheerful life, going to

Dublin and London, and having people staying with them.

Owing to the discovery of some minerals on the property, it had considerably righted itself; and Colonel O'Brien had also fallen heir to a large sum of money, and was once more a prosperous man.

His spirits improved by entering again into the world, and now they led a very gay pleasant life; friends came thronging about them, only too happy to renew the acquaintance; and for a time all went merry as a marriage bell.

But soon the scene was changed. Colonel O'Brien's money was all invested in shares in a company apparently very prosperous and lucrative; but it burst one day very unexpectedly, and he not only lost all his own fortune, but became responsible to a very considerable amount. Just before this happened, Ulick had again gone to sea; so he was not at home to console them under this new calamity. They returned to their retired mode of life, which indeed was also necessary on Colonel O'Brien's account.

His health was not so good as formerly; his misfortunes had preyed upon him; and when the tidings came that his much-loved son had perished in a storm in consequence of his noble adherence to his post, Colonel O'Brien sunk beneath this fresh blow.

An attack of paralysis laid him on a long and lingering bed of sickness; and when death released his daughter from her patient and affectionate attendance, she found she was an orphan, penniless, and without a relation or friend on whom she had the slightest claim for protection or a home.

The Irish property went to a distant connexion who resided in the West Indies, and of whom she knew

nothing; and every penny that was not claimed by him as heir-at-law justly belonged to her father's creditors.

And so it was that Nelly O'Brien had to become a governess.

She had profited by her French education, and spoke the language like a native; with German and Italian she was perfectly acquainted, and she drew and painted more than commonly well. In music she was not a proficient, which was strange in a being so gifted in other respects; but she had no voice, and merely played a little. Her father's agent was the only person who interested himself about the forlorn girl; all the people to whom they had shown and from whom they had received hospitality proved to be indeed summer friends; they passed by on the other side, and they stood afar off.

No one to pity, no one to protect. From one or two she received polite letters of condolence, but none asked whither she was going or whither she went.

Mr. White alone exerted himself for her; and he was merely a good worthy man, who thought the sooner the poor creature was put in the way of maintaining herself, the better.

He heard of this situation to which she was now going, and under his direction she applied for it. The want of proficiency in music was not an objection in the eyes of Mrs. Jennings, as there chanced to be a very good music master in A——; and she wished an accomplished linguist above everything, and was also most anxious that her daughters should learn to draw well.

So she engaged Miss O'Brien; and now the reader has the whole history and prospects of my fair and interesting companion.

But I have not yet described her— and yet I almost despair of being able to convey even the faintest impression of that charming face, that lives in my memory as one of the brightest things I ever encountered. I dare say she was not classically beautiful, very likely not ; but for all that, I think I never saw a more attractive face.

Hers were the only eyes that ever realized to my mind the epithet of “starlike.”

Large, dark gray eyes, true as the clearest mirror, and with a look of liquid softness that was totally irresistible. They could flash, too, merrily, angrily ; but the last expression was very rare. But the starlike appearance proceeded principally from the long drooping lashes, that shaded them as if they had been pencilled, and almost altered the character of her face when they were raised and when they were cast down.

Yes ! they were lovely eyes.

Her nose, do not start, fair reader, was decidedly *retroussé*, but it was a very pretty nose for all that.

The mouth was wide, decidedly too wide for perfect beauty ; but who would notice that with such a pair of lips, beautifully shaped, full, and bright as coral ; and when they parted, which was very often, displaying teeth like rows of seed pearls.

Her complexion was a true Irish one, and more I cannot say. It varied with every word, with every thought ; and by its constant alternations, and the rapid play of her features, I was often reminded of a sweet April day, when sunshine and clouds succeed each other in delightful variety. Soft, wavy brown hair, with golden ripples on its glossy braids, as if a sunbeam were imprisoned there. A slight, graceful young figure, beautifully moulded ; and the hands and

feet of a Grecian statue. Such was Nelly O'Brien when first I met her this cold, stormy day, in the railway carriage.

Male reader, don't you envy me? Female reader, don't you think Miss O'Brien a very forward and improperly behaved young person?

Nearly three hours wore away in this manner; and every moment saw me more and more enchanted with my fair companion.

It was extraordinary the friends we had become; poor thing, it was long since she had heard the language of kindness or sympathy; and she opened to me her warm Irish heart, and felt that her confidence was not misplaced.

Fortunately for the growth of our acquaintance, no other passenger entered the carriage, which we had entirely to ourselves the whole way to A——.

We reached that place very late in the afternoon, or rather early in the evening; and, leaving Miss O'Brien in the waiting-room at the station, I went out to ascertain if any person were there to receive her, or any conveyance in attendance. How it did rain! And the wind! I could scarcely hold my hat on with both my hands. Just a fearful evening.

And what do you think that kind, considerate Mrs. Jennings had sent to meet the young, friendless governess, and to take her nearly five miles in this wretched weather! A miserable dogcart, driven by a young boy-groom, and with not even a warm wrapper to protect her from the wet and cold. I perfectly boiled with indignation at such a reception to the poor, sad-hearted girl; and augured very ill for her future comfort with a woman who could act in such a heartless manner.

I resolved, however, to care very differently for her journey; and calling to a respectable fly-man, who was in waiting with his well-appointed vehicle, (he was often at the barracks, and knew me very well;) "Soames," I said, "there is a young lady here whom you will take out to Hawksley; and remember, you are not to let her discover that you are not ordered by Mrs. Jennings. Come to me for your fare; and if she finds out I sent you, or if you take a sixpence from her, I will never employ you again. Do you understand?"

"Oh! yes, sir. I'll do it all right. Depend on me, sir."

I then spoke to the Hawksley groom, and told him that owing to the heavy rain the lady would take a cab, and that he need not wait.

After all this, I returned to my fair charge, told her a fly was in readiness, and conveyed herself and her luggage safely into it. Poor girl, her eyes filled with tears as she bid me good-by; and with many kind parting speeches on both sides we separated, and sweet Nelly O'Brien began her first solitary experience of the tender mercies of the wide, wide world.

CHAPTER XX.

ELEANOR THOMPSON IN TROUBLE.

HAVING thus disposed of my fair companion, I returned to the station to look after my own more immediate belongings. Here I found Percy Lascelles prowling frantically up and down, inspecting the interiors of empty carriages, and looking generally disturbed in mind and body.

"Hulloa, Percy!" I exclaimed.

"Bless the boy, where has he been?" was his reply. "I saw your traps lying about, and supposed you had arrived; but old Willis sent for me just as I was starting from the barracks, so I missed the train. Well, how are you, old fellow? All right, eh?"

"As a trivet," I replied; "and not sorry to get back to the old quarters after all."

"Well, you won't find much going on here, I can tell you. I'm not much of a gossip as you know; but I hear the young ones saying it is uncommonly slow at present."

"That must be mended forthwith. What are the Thompsons doing? Nothing in that quarter?"

"Oh! get Barry or Splashton, or some of the chatterers to tell you all the A—— news; it's not so

important that it won't keep; and now collect your traps and let us be off, for a good roaring fire is the best place such a day as this."

So we departed to the barracks, and a regular shout of welcome awaited me in the mess-room.

Lazy, idle dogs were many of them, but good-hearted fellows all; and my arrival was a blessed advent, as it had been, according to Splashton's expressive phraseology, "a beastly day."

They surrounded me instantly, asked me a dozen questions in a breath, without ever waiting for replies; and began chaffing me immensely about my rescue of Lucile Vane.

Mixed with it was a vast amount of praise and congratulation. "A regular little trump, by Jove!" "What a deuced clever idea! how did you ever come by it, Charley?" "Deserve to get a medal from the Humane Society," and so on; till Percy Lascelles came and dragged me off, "or I should never be in time for mess."

Major Thompson and Major Clavering gave me a very cordial reception; but it did strike me that there was something peculiar in the manner of the latter, and that he avoided meeting my eyes when he spoke. I scarcely gave it a thought however; it struck me more on after recollection.

It seemed that it really was very slow in A——. Miss Vane and her parents were absent, as she had not fully rallied from the severe shock she had sustained; and a further change of scene had been recommended. Even the Thompsons were not as gay as usual, and it was generally surmised that "something was up" in that quarter. Eleanor and Captain Haultain were

a complete puzzle to the community at large ; but it was rather imagined that she had somehow or other hooked her fish, but that there was a screw loose somewhere. I called there the day after my return, but they were all from home.

I also called on dear little Mrs. Grant, and found her smiling and fascinating as usual. She had so much to ask and to hear ; and detained me until the Colonel returned, as she was sure he would be sorry to miss me.

He received me very kindly, and then told me that the General had postponed his visit of inspection for ten days ; and that if I wished to go anywhere for a week or so, I might take the remainder of my leave at once.

My uncle had offered me the run of his house if at any time I chose to avail myself of it ; so I thought a week in town would not be a bad arrangement, and I accepted Colonel Grant's proposal.

It happened to be a fine day, and I felt inclined for a walk ; so as I did not see Percy Lascelles anywhere about, I started by myself, and chose a secluded foot-path that led by the side of some fields and through a kind of wooded glen. I was in a higher walk than that usually taken by foot passengers ; and though the low path was quite open to my view, it was not easy to see anyone who might be passing above.

So though I saw Captain Haultain coming leisurely back through the glen, he did not perceive me ; and I felt no inclination for his society, so made no manifestation of my vicinity.

Still further along the path was a closely screened seat, towards which I directed my steps ; but as I

approached it within a few steps, I heard sounds as of a woman in distress, choking sobs, and half uttered exclamations.

Not being desirous to intrude, I was turning softly away ; when Vixen betrayed my presence by rushing forward, and instantly claiming the attention of the occupant of the seat.

I called to him to follow me, when I heard my name pronounced by a voice I knew well ; and Eleanor Thompson, her cheeks flushed and stained with weeping, and her eyes still swimming in tears, rose and stood before me.

“ Miss Thompson ! I am very sorry—I did not know who it was, but I heard sounds of grief, and was returning hoping not to be heard. Can I do anything for you ? I am so sorry to see you in such distress.”

“ I am so glad it is you, Mr. Nugent ; I feared it might be strangers, or some one whom I should not wish to see me in this state. But I know you will not mention it.”

“ I will not indeed ; but can I help you in any way ? May I know the cause of your grief ? ”

“ It is a strange cause,” she replied, smiling sadly, and yet the tears starting as she spoke. “ The thing I most wish may be mine ; and yet I dread to fulfil the condition attached to gaining it.”

I looked puzzled, and she said, “ Come in here, and I will tell you all about it, for I am sorely in want of a friend and counsellor ; there is no one to whom I can apply,” and she began to cry again.

I began to think that I was having the luck of it with weeping damsels, and felt rather dignified at being so soon again entrusted with the confidence of

beauty in distress. Eleanor Thompson did not look ugly, as some women do, when they cry.

If she did not look so charming and irresistible in her grief as the lovely Nelly O'Brien, whose eyes were doubly glorious when veiled in a pellucid mist of bright tears, at least she looked decidedly interesting and softened; she did not get a red nose like many women, and she wiped her eyes very gracefully.

But she was in real sorrow this time, poor girl! there was no mistake about that; so I seated myself beside her, and offered all the consolation in my power.

"It is not comfort I need, Mr. Nugent, it is advice; it seems so strange for me to ask a young creature like you what to do in a difficulty; but I know you have kind, good feelings, and you will tell me what you really think, for my judgment is not clear just now."

"I will do the best in my power, Miss Thompson, if you will only explain what your difficulty is."

She blushed, and turned away her head. "You know Captain Haultain, Mr. Nugent?"

"Bless me!" I inwardly ejaculated, "surely she does not mean me to ask his intentions!" But I replied very demurely, "I don't know very much of him, but I have met him at your house and elsewhere. He passed this way just before I came up."

"Yes, he had been with me till then. Well, it is about him that I am doubtful what I should do. I suppose you have heard us talked about, Mr. Nugent? Everybody in A—— does so."

"I have frequently heard your name coupled with his, Miss Thompson; but of course we both know what a gossiping place A—— is."

"Well, but it is right in this case; he has asked me to be his wife, and I would marry him willingly, only for a condition he insists on, to which I will not agree."

"And may I learn the condition?"

"That I consent to a private marriage; in short, I must elope with him; and it is a step from which I perfectly shrink."

"I do not wonder at it, especially when there is no necessity for doing anything of the kind. Captain Haultain is surely his own master, and your parents would have no objections to him I suppose?"

"None whatever, but still he insists upon it; and I must either agree to it or give him up."

"How very strange!" I replied. "Does he give no motive for such a singular wish on his part? It is a step only excusable under very extenuating circumstances; and in your case there is apparently no earthly reason why things should not be conducted in the usual way."

"I can scarcely call his motives reasons," she said with some confusion. "I am pretty sure that he has a strong aversion to the idea that people will say he has been manœuvred into proposing to me; and that we are a designing family, who have succeeded in taking him in. He does like me," she continued, flushing high as she spoke, "and really wishes to marry me; but even for my sake he will not expose himself to unpleasant remarks, and he fancies they will be greatly avoided by doing as he proposes."

"I cannot say that he shows an equal amount of consideration for your feelings, Miss Thompson," was my reply; "and he is exposing you to remarks that few men would choose their wives to encounter, merely

to avoid a little harmless bantering which can do him no harm."

"I know it," she replied in a faltering tone; "I know it well, and I dread such a step, more than I can say; but there is no alternative, I must either resign him entirely, or agree to what he wishes."

"And you cannot make up your mind?" I said inquiringly; "this is your difficulty?"

"Yes," she replied, "I am in a strait between two opinions. Some people would never hesitate for a moment, but would at once negative such a demand, and abide the consequences; but then, I know I should lose him; and some, my own sisters I believe among the number, would raise no objections to the plan, but would secure him at any cost. I feel as if I could do neither the one nor the other. Do not despise me for my candour, Mr. Nugent; be indulgent to my weakness, and think kindly of me if you can. I may trust you, may I not?"

"Most thoroughly," I replied; "I will never under any circumstances betray the confidence you are now reposing in me; and I only wish I knew how to advise you rightly, so as best to secure your happiness."

"You do not like Captain Haultain much, I think?" she inquired.

"I have scarcely spoken to him," I replied, "and I own he did not make a very favourable impression on me; but that is nothing, he may be a most estimable man for all I know to the contrary. Only, my dear Miss Thompson, if he really loves you, how can he ask you to do what evidently makes you so unhappy? It is not generous in him to employ the power he has over you to so unworthy an end."

She sighed. "He is very peculiar, and I fear rather obstinate. And now that he sees I dislike the idea, he has made it a proof of my affection for him; and that is why I hesitate."

I reflected for a few minutes, and felt a little doubtful about the whole business. I did not like Captain Haultain, he was not at all a popular character with men, and his moral qualities did not stand very high in general estimation. He might mean well by Eleanor Thompson, and his present proceedings might be only the freak of an ill-regulated mind; but there were certainly reasonable grounds for a little doubt on this subject, and I determined to befriend the poor girl who had come to me in her sorrow, and to guard her if possible against any evil that might befall her. But I kept my cogitations to myself, and a suspicion of this nature appeared never to have occurred to her.

At last I spoke.

"Are you so sure, Miss Thompson, that if you positively refused compliance with this foolish proposal of Captain Haultain's, he would really do what he says? Do you not think it might attach him to you more firmly, if he found that your principles were too decided to permit you to yield; and that you would rather lose his affection than your own self-respect?"

"No, no," she replied; "I know him too well for that. He said he would leave me, he swore he would; and I am sure he will."

"Then I cannot consider a love so selfish and inconsiderate worth retaining. It is a bad commencement to your wedded life to find such a total want of tenderness and manly feeling at the very outset. Give him up, Miss Thompson, you will never be happy

as his wife, he cannot be a kind husband. Do be advised and have nothing more to say to him."

"Ah!" she said with a shiver, "you do not know what that would be."

"Do you then love him so well?" I inquired, looking with interest on the saddened expression of her fine features. "Pity he is not more deserving of it, for I cannot think him so."

"I love him very, very dearly," she replied, shading her eyes with her hand, and weeping afresh. "People say and think that I have no heart; but I have, and it is misleading me now. I have had many flirtations, many; and some were perhaps more than that; but never till now have I felt the force of a very strong attachment, I feel as if in giving up Captain Haultain, I should give up all that makes life worth having. I see many bad qualities in him, I know he is selfish, inconsiderate, ill-tempered, I do not feel sure that he will prove a kind husband, I do not even think he loves me as well as I do him,—and yet his faults only endear him the more to me, they are nothing in my eyes; his very coldness and indifference at times only rivet him more firmly to my heart. I cannot live without him."

She spoke with great excitement, and rising hurriedly, she paced quickly up and down the narrow path, grief and irresolution vividly depicted in her countenance; I watched her with silent pity, so true, so desperate an attachment could not but command respect. Poor girl, what a future lay before her if she married the man to whom she had so unreservedly given her heart!

Woman! woman! what a strange, unfathomable compound thou art! Here was a woman, no unfledged

girl, but an experienced woman of the world; and she candidly avowed that her love was bestowed on a man to whom she could attribute no good quality, but an assemblage of the very worst; nay, she was more than doubtful of the reality of his affection, and far from confident of a happy future with him; and yet she owned to loving him with a love that overcame all obstacles, and saw in all his faults but weaknesses that only endeared him the more!

Silent once more, I puzzled over what to say now.

It rather surprised me, that with such an unhesitating weakness for the good looking artillery-man, she should have such strong scruples about eloping with him; but that was no business of mine, and this was evidently Eleanor Thompson's stumbling block.

She spoke first.

"What do you think of me now, Mr. Nugent? Is my folly too great for even your sympathy?"

"Quite the contrary, my dear Miss Thompson. Your folly, as you choose to term it, has my very warmest sympathy. I would only advise you to think well before you do anything rash. It must be very sad when such love as this cools or changes to a very different feeling; and very bitter must be the waking from a dream that never can return."

"It must," she replied; "I know that such a change must and will come to me, and yet,—oh! I am a fool!" she exclaimed, "I do not know what I say or what I wish."

"You are excited now," I replied; "think calmly over the matter, and remember that though you may be unhappy for a time if you break off with Captain Haultain, it will be merely a transient sorrow; you will recover from that and be happy again; but as

a neglected, miserable, unloving wife, your repentance can only end with the grave."

"I will think of it," she replied; "and whatever my decision may be, I will ever gratefully remember your kindness, Mr. Nugent; you have placed the consequences of my folly before me, should I yield; but indeed you have only told me what I know already."

"Then do nothing rashly, my dear Miss Thompson; and promise me that when your mind is made up one way or other, you will let me know."

"I must tell him to-morrow," she replied.

"So soon?"

"Yes, he is very impatient, and says all this suspense unsettles and worries him."

I kept my private opinion of the gallant Captain to myself this time; but I inwardly rejoiced that no one to whom I had anything to say was likely to become the subject of his matrimonial overtures.

She decided to give the matter a night's consideration, and with this understanding we parted, after I had escorted her home; but I know she had another interview with him that evening, for Barry and I came past that way about ten o'clock, and encountered Haultain and a fair companion very closely veiled; but beneath all the disguise of poke bonnet and loosely fitting cloak, I had not the slightest difficulty in recognising the graceful figure and bearing of Eleanor Thompson; and I had equally little doubt as to the result of that moonlight rencontre.

It all fell out as I imagined.

Early next day I had a note from her, begging me to go over there as soon as I could. She met me in the lobby, and taking me into a little snuggerly more peculiarly appropriated to the use of the young ladies,

she told me that her mind was finally made up ; and in spite of all the promptings of her better nature, she had disregarded the still small voice that bade her hesitate ; and was resolved to consent to the plan of elopement proposed by Captain Haultain, and to share his home and fortunes.

“ Well, Miss Thompson, you know best ; I sincerely hope and wish you may be happy, and I trust you will never have to regret the step you are taking. And now, can I help you in any way ? I am quite at your disposal, for I feel a deep interest in the whole affair.”

She held out her little white hand, and smiled, but with tearful eyes. I took it in mine, and pressed it to my lips. There was something very attractive about Eleanor Thompson ; you could not help liking her in spite of her many faults.

“ I am very, very grateful for the kindness you have already shown me, Mr. Nugent ; and I am going to ask a very great favour, if indeed you will not consider I am presuming too far on your goodness.” She hesitated and looked at me.

“ That is impossible,” I replied ; “ I am entirely at your service ; and if I am at all correct in my surmises as to the nature of your request, it is the very thing I should like to have proposed myself.”

“ What do you think it is ?” she inquired.

“ Something to do with seeing you safely through your little romance,” I replied, smiling ; “ you might like to feel that you are not alone in the wide, wide world ; and that a sweet little cherub, myself for instance, is watching over you from somewhere in the dim recesses of the express train.”

“ You kind, kind creature !” she exclaimed, with a

rapid application of a small square of muslin and lace to her eyes; "I should scarcely have known how to word my request, but I see you understand me. Ah me!" she continued, while a painful blush mounted to her very temples, "it is a fearful thought that I who am making every sacrifice and doing so much I condemn for the love of this man, yet cannot feel sufficient confidence in him to trust him thoroughly. My life, my happiness, my whole future are ventured on this cast; alas! if it should prove to have been worse than all in vain."

What could I say to re-assure her? Nothing, and that was exactly what I said. I felt as certain as if I knew it already that Eleanor Haultain would be a miserable woman; but all my arguments were useless, for no one knew better than herself how much she was risking.

They were to quit A—— the very next evening, taking the train to Scotland; and were to be married at Gretna Green immediately on their arrival.

It was a very absurd affair, there was no doubt of that; to think of tearing about the country in that frantic manner, for no earthly reason except that the gallant bridegroom wished to prove that he had managed the matter his own way, and had not been cajoled by designing old mother Thompson into taking one of her daughters off her hands.

I *hoped* everything was right and above board, and determined to keep a very sharp look-out on the proceedings of the handsome artilleryman.

In the meantime, I had my own little arrangements to make for my share of the elopement; and many a hearty laugh I had as I put together a few necessities for the midnight journey.

Eleanor was to leave a note for her mother where it was certain to be found next morning ; and pursuit or objection she well knew was little to be dreaded.

Captain Haultain had just received an order which removed him from A——, and appointed him to another station, at which Eleanor was much satisfied, as it would keep them from encountering any of her former friends for some time.

He had obtained a month's leave of absence, however, and this was to be employed in making a bridal excursion.

I shall reserve my description of the elopement for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TRIP TO GREYNA GREEN.

THE following evening, or rather night, for it was nearly eleven o'clock, I posted myself in a convenient position for watching the Thompsons' domicile—getting of course well under the shadow of a doorway.

I had not been there many minutes before I saw Captain Haultain advancing slowly up the street; and he passed the house without any other notice than coughing in a peculiar manner, continuing his course until he reached the corner, which was very close at hand.

The Thompsons' hall door was then opened very cautiously; Eleanor came out with a faltering step, and closed the door softly behind her.

She wore a thick veil and a deep cloak of some dark material, and she carried a small travelling bag in her hand.

Turning her steps to where her lover was waiting for her, she was instantly met by him and relieved of her burden; and I could see that he held her hand tenderly, and bent down, as he spoke to her, as if he were trying to cheer her and soothe her agitation.

All this I saw by the light of a lamp, for it was a

dark, moonless night, most *apropos* for a runaway adventure.

They then walked rapidly in the direction of the railway station, which was not far off ; and I cautiously followed their example, for I was anything but desirous of a collision with the ardent lover, and felt that in such a case the affair might have a very unpleasant termination.

The platform was very dimly lighted ; and only a few sleepy porters were prowling about, waiting the arrival of the express train.

Captain Haultain led Miss Thompson into the darkest part of the station, and left her for a few moments while he went to secure tickets.

As soon as he was out of sight I approached her quickly.

" All right," I said ; " I'm here, and I won't lose sight of you under any circumstances."

" Oh ! thanks, thanks !" she said, gratefully. " How shall I ever repay such kindness ?"

" Don't mention it," I replied ; " and now I'm off for fear of accident, and I must get my ticket, too."

I was just in time, for Captain Haultain emerged from the office at that moment ; but being well in the shade he could not see me, and I got behind a large truck and slipped past him.

I took a second class ticket, as affording better opportunities for concealment ; and just then the whistle of the advancing train re-echoed through the still night air, and in another minute it was rolling noisily into the station, and all was bustle and confusion.

Captain Haultain handed Eleanor into a carriage, and then jumped in himself ; I did the same, and

the next instant we were whirling rapidly away from A——.

It was not by any means so pleasant a journey as my last ; for instead of a pretty girl, my companions consisted of a couple of greasy-looking mercantile travellers, a prodigiously hairy foreign professional, and a huge vulgar woman with a very over-fed looking child, who every now and then became decidedly uneasy in mind and body, and indulged in a series of violent roars, refusing to be quieted for an immense length of time. These people dropped off by degrees, however, and were succeeded by others not a bit more inviting in appearance ; so I kept myself to myself, and beguiled the weary hours by a variety of profound cogitations.

At every halt of the train I bolted out and resumed my system of *surveillance* ; a wide cap pulled well over my ears and face, and the collar of my coat drawn up to its full extent in conjunction with the dim light, enabling me to feel pretty secure as to any risk of detection.

I saw nothing, however, that could excite the slightest suspicion that fair play was not intended ; and the gray dawn gave way to the full blaze of sunlight, and found us well on our journey to the Scottish border.

An hour or two longer, and the porters in a most unmelodious dialect are informing the occupants of each carriage that the station at which they are now pausing is "Gretna Green." Mystic syllables ! Through how many beating hearts have they vibrated, even when delivered in the unconscious and matter-of-fact tones of a railway official ! But I had no time just then to indulge in romantic meditations ; great activity and tact were required, so that I might effect my exit

without observation. A few sheds were erected close to the platform, which seemed to promise the requisite amount of shelter ; and slipping quickly from the carriage, I ensconced myself behind one of them ; a capital post of observation, for I could see in every direction, and yet remain quite hidden myself.

The happy couple emerged into the broad light of day ; they were the only other people who got out here, and an immense amount of interest was instantly attached to their arrival by the guards and porters, who winked to each other and gave sly nods in their direction ; and also by a number of their late fellow passengers, who rapidly put down the carriage windows, and stared curiously at them. It was only for a moment, however ; the shrill whistle of the engine was followed by the resumption of its puffing and blowing, and once more the train was in motion, leaving the runaway couple at their destination.

Eleanor's veil was much too thick for any one to see her features, and she held it tightly clasped lest the breeze might for an instant displace it ; but her attitude was timid and shrinking, and I saw by the quick movement of her head that she glanced round as if in search of me.

I dared not emerge from my concealment, however, the risk was much too great ; but in another minute, Captain Haultain gave her his arm, and led her to the gate where a one horse fly was standing, I suppose on the chance of a similar contingency to the present.

They seated themselves in the shabby looking vehicle, and after the exchange of a few words with the coachman, were rapidly driven off in the direction of a meanly built house, some little way off ; their Jehu winking jocosely to the attendant porter, and

making various signs of perfectly understanding the business on which his fare was bound.

I now walked boldly forth, and looked about me.

Bless us all ! what a dismal place it was for the haven of disconsolate lovers, and the Rubicon of their future bliss !

A flat, treeless, dreary expanse of gray looking country, with cold misty mountains looming in the distance, and scarcely any signs of human habitation beyond the few houses in the immediate neighbourhood of the station.

The temple of Hymen was a hideous building, in appearance like a third rate farm house ; unadorned in any way, and as bare of trees or shrubs as if such things were unknown in the country.

All the romance and sentiment that one had been inclined to attach to the idea of Gretna Green, vanished into thin air on gazing at the perfect commonplace of the whole affair ; and I confess that I indulged in such a hearty explosion of merriment as to draw upon me the attention of the porter in attendance.

" Anything I can do for you, sir ? Be ye going to cross the country, for be like you are not stopping here ? "

" Just for the present I am, my good man, " I replied.

" When do the next trains pass this way ? "

He gave me the desired information, and we had a little friendly conversation on various matters.

" Couple just gone up yonder to be married, sir ; came by the same train as you did, sir. "

" How long will they be about it ? " I inquired.

" Oh ! matter of half an hour or so, for ye see the

parson will have to clean his self belike ; he's only a smith, you know, sir."

I haw-haw'd again ; the notion of the exquisite Captain Haultain and the graceful Eleanor pledging their vows before this brawny son of Mars, I thought remarkably comical. The porter laughed too.

"Look here," I said ; "will you do a little job for me, and I will reward you for it."

"With pleasure, sir ; train won't be up this long time."

"You must be very careful, recollect, and follow my directions very closely."

"Ay, ay sir ; I expect I twigs what you're after, summut about the lady and gemman there ;" nodding his head towards the temple of Hymen.

"Exactly so," I replied. "I want a message from the lady that it's all right ; just a few words on a bit of paper. Can you manage this, do you think ?"

"I think I can, sir ; least ways I'll do my best. I know a young woman as is a servant there, and I expect she'll manage it for me."

"Very well," I said, "that will do ; only remember it must be when the gentleman is out of the way, he must know nothing about it."

"All right, sir, I understands. You wait here till I come back ; and it'll be hard if I don't bring you the bit of writing."

He departed accordingly, and I lighted a cigar and resigned myself philosophically to my reflections, and to a considerable amount of detention in this not very lively locality.

But the blacksmith must have performed his ablutions beforehand on the chance of his services being in requisition on the arrival of the express ; for in much

less time than I had anticipated, I beheld my messenger returning.

On reaching me he produced a small folded scrap of paper, on which with a pencil Eleanor had traced a few hurried lines.

"I can *never* thank you enough, dear Mr. Nugent, never, never; no brother could do more than you have done. But we are married now, he is my own dear husband, and I feel grieved that I did not trust him more entirely, for I am sure he loves me. You will never betray me in any way I know; he must never suspect the part you have played, for my sake and for your own.

"Once more my *heartfelt* gratitude.

"Your sincere friend,

"ELEANOR HAULTAIN."

"Well, it's done now," I soliloquized, "and what's done cannot be undone. I only hope she may be happier than I expect; for she's a nice girl, and he's a brute if he ill-treats her."

So I rewarded my friend the porter, bound him over to silence, and took the next train back to England.

I knew that Captain Haultain intended taking his bride for a tour through some of the picturesque Scotch scenery, and imagined they would feel no particular inclination to prolong their stay in their present resting-place. As I did not again encounter them for a considerable time, I may as well finish their history for the present.

The elopement created, as might be imagined, no small sensation and scandal in A——; and if Captain Haultain thought that the plan he had pursued would

prevent the usual amount of gossip and ill-natured remarks, I can only say he was very much mistaken, as people allowed their tongues no trifling latitude on the occasion.

On the whole, I think the senior portion of the Thompson family rather rejoiced at it after the first *esclandre* had blown over, as they were saved all the expense and trouble of a wedding and the attendant entertainment; so they wrote very affectionately to Mrs. Haultain, and gave her their blessing and good wishes; and by and by something else sprung up to be talked about, and Eleanor's elopement was forgotten.

I had a letter from her about a fortnight after her marriage; and she told me she was the happiest of the happy, Gerald kindness and devotion personified, and she had not a wish in the world. She again spoke most gratefully of my exertions in her behalf, and told me she should ever consider me one of her best and truest friends.

I sighed as I finished reading the outpourings of her happiness, and sincerely wished, poor girl! that her horizon might long remain equally unclouded; but I much feared, I much feared.

CHAPTER XXII.

DARK DAYS AT THE FARM.

OF course the reader is aware that I had obtained a renewal of my leave of absence ; therefore, after seeing Miss Thompson well through her troubles and safely landed in the haven of matrimony, I turned my steps towards London, (having previously apprised my uncle of my intentions in that respect) and did not return to A——.

The worthy old gentleman received me with great cordiality, and said he was very glad to see me, which I really believe he was.

As I did not arrive until very late in the evening, some excuse was necessary to explain how I came to select that hour for travelling ; but when I mentioned that I had been transacting some business near Carlisle, my uncle appeared to take it for granted that it was connected with the affairs of the regiment, and asked no more questions on the subject.

He was very kind indeed, devised a variety of entertainments on my behalf, and four or five days slipped away very pleasantly.

I may as well mention that I called on Granville St. John, and met with the warmest and most friendly of receptions ; his feelings of gratitude had certainly

in no degree evaporated, and it was only by forcibly representing the prior claim that my uncle had upon me, that I was enabled to resist his repeated solicitations that I should take up my abode with him while I remained in town.

Colonel Nugent and I both dined with him, however; and a most *recherché* entertainment it was in every way. The guests were among the *élite* of the best society, the viands and wine perfectly beyond criticism: it was a model of a bachelor party. Mr. St. John also took me under his especial wing as a neophyte in London "society," and procured me invitations to several most exclusive gatherings of the great world; where he sedulously devoted himself to ensuring my enjoyment of the gay scene, and introduced me to whole legions of titled and untitled angels in voluminous skirts of crinoline and tarlatane, till I was half giddy with the lustre of their dazzling charms, and the mazy evolutions of Strauss and Kœnig's enchanting waltzes.

But if "'Tis always the darkest the hour before day," I have often in the course of my pilgrimage here below most particularly noticed, that when one is least expecting or suspecting a blow from any quarter, at that very time something unpleasant is sure to happen.

I was, as I said, having a very jolly time of it in London; feasting and flirting, and trying to forget that in two or three days I must bid adieu to this pleasant life, and forthwith betake myself to the dull routine of barracks; when on returning one afternoon from a lounge down St. James's Street, I found a hurriedly scrawled note in Percy Lascelles' writing lying on the hall table.

The reader shall have it all.

“DEAR CHARLEY—Willis begs me to let you know that your leave is up on Thursday, as the General will be here upon Friday.

“I shall be glad to have you back again, for I am much puzzled as well as grieved about a very sad business, that will distress you greatly I am sure. Farmer Morland’s granddaughter, that pretty little girl at the farm has disappeared in the most unaccountable manner, leaving not the slightest trace of where she has gone. The poor old couple are in a frantic state, and have no idea what or whom to suspect; and Farmer Morland was here to-day in a condition little short of distraction. I comforted him as well as I could, poor man; but what could I say? I could only assure him that I felt for him very deeply, and would do all in my power to assist him in tracing the poor girl, who has been the victim of most foul treachery.

“Partly from my own observation, partly from remarks you let fall, a horrible suspicion would every now and then keep forcing itself upon me; God forgive me if it is an unfounded one! but I cannot succeed in getting rid of it. Not *you*, Charley, not you for an instant: I have the most entire faith in your innocence, you loved the poor girl as a sister; though Clavering (who came in while the miserable old man was sitting with me, and *seemed* much grieved on learning his sad loss) hinted after Farmer Morland was gone, that you had taken a most active interest in the pretty little rustic; and that the charmingly pastoral life you had led there was well calculated to turn stronger heads than yours and the fair Amy’s. How I *hate* that sneering, heartless way of speaking

that he indulges in on such occasions ! but he got it, Charley, he got it in return. When he proceeded to insinuate that your movements had been very unsettled and erratic lately ; and that you had certainly taken a long country walk after your return to A——, and then suddenly applied for fresh leave of absence, I could stand it no longer ; the lion in me was fairly roused.

“ Clavering and I were never on very friendly terms, but we shall be still less so for the future, and I feel it not a thing to be regretted.

“ However, I shall be glad to see you here ; and we must try what can be done to trace the whereabouts of the unfortunate girl, and discover what has become of her. Some horrible treachery must have been employed to induce her to leave her home as she has done ; for she was as innocent and pure-minded as an angel, and the blacker the villain who has betrayed a creature so sweet and simple. The poor old farmer ! I shall not soon forget his broken-hearted look, and the tears running down his face.

“ He did not say if he suspected any one in the barracks, only that he had come with a faint hope of hearing of her ; but that was soon disappointed. I went over to Mrs. Grant on the chance of her being able to suggest a gleam of comfort ; but she knew no more than myself. She came back with me, however, and spoke most kindly and feelingly to Farmer Morland, and made him swallow a glass of wine before he left the barracks to prosecute his search still farther.

“ You must go out there as soon as you return, and do your best to comfort him, poor soul, for he is in great sorrow.

“ I have written at once, for I know how much it

will interest you ; and you may be able to throw some light on the fate of the poor girl.

“ Ever yours truly,

“ PERCY LASCELLES.”

I received a dreadful shock on reading this letter, and for a few minutes I stood with it open in my hand, scarcely able to realize the information it contained.

That sweet little Amy, the most innocent and guileless creature I had ever met, she never could have left her home from any evil motives, it was perfectly, totally out of the question.

I could not believe it possible that the greatest fiend of wickedness could have the heart to imagine, far less to carry out any project that could bring sin and misery into that young and tender heart ; it was not to be thought of for an instant, some other reason must be found for her disappearance.

Frightful accidents happened at times ; people mysteriously vanished without a trace, and were found drowned, or perhaps murdered in solitary places, months and years after the affair was forgotten. Something of this kind must have occurred in her case ; it could be nothing else.

I re-read Percy's letter, and a cold chill came over me as I did so ; I knew on whom his suspicion rested, and a dim foreboding of evil seemed to fasten on my heart as many little recollections crowded thick and fast on my memory.

Any way no time must be lost ; and hastily informing my uncle that some imperative business had summoned me back to A——, I sent for a cab, tossed my things rapidly into my portmanteau, and

in less than an hour I was once more whirling along in the train, my impatience causing me to regard every stoppage as a most unjustifiable delay. As I crossed the barrack square the first person I encountered was Major Clavering.

I saluted him with cold politeness, he returned it equally frigidly, and was passing on; when after a moment's hesitation he stopped, and said in a tone of affected indifference, "Surely, Mr. Nugent, you had still some days of leave unexpired. You are a model of punctuality."

"*Punctuality* has nothing whatever to do with my sudden return," I replied; "I am come, Major Clavering, to use my best endeavours in assisting her friends to trace Amy Lesley, and to discover the villain who has deceived and betrayed her."

I spoke hotly and impetuously; for there was something in the aspect of the cold-blooded-looking profligate before me, combined with the remembrance of his sneering and insidious hints to my discredit, that made my pulses beat high, and raised a commotion of angry feelings at my heart.

Something stirred within him too, for a fierce light gleamed in his pale blue eye, and I saw that he bit his under lip till the blood came; but he put an immense restraint upon himself, and answered in a languid sort of way, as though it were a matter in which he could naturally feel but slightly interested, "Ah! indeed, is that your motive? She was a pretty little girl if I remember rightly; but you are rather a youthful champion, Mr. Nugent."

"I hope I shall not prove a less determined one on that account," I replied; "it will go hard with me if I do not discover the seducer of that innocent girl,

and hold him up to the scorn and detestation that he deserves."

Again did a troubled look come into the major's impassable countenance; and but for the sheer and utter impossibility of his taking offence at my carefully guarded words, our discussion had been far from a pleasant one. But we had mutually had enough, and knew that in future it was a covert war to the knife between us.

A cold steel-like glitter was in his eye as he turned away with the faint sneer he could not entirely repress. "Such enthusiastic ardour really merits a reward, so I must wish you success in your chivalrous crusade, Mr. Nugent;" then nodding slightly he continued his course, and I entered the barracks and went straight to Percy's room.

He was smoking a pipe before dressing for mess; and his handsome features wore a look of grave concern, as he slowly puffed forth volumes of fragrant smoke. He looked round and nodded as I opened the door.

"Ah! that's right, Charley, I'm glad you're come. Of course you received my letter?"

"Yes, and started instantly; not that I can throw much more light on the business than yourself. Percy, do you not think there is the slightest chance of its being an accident of some kind? Anything better than that the poor girl has been disgraced for ever."

He shook his head sadly. "No, Charley; they have made every possible search, dragged the only piece of water within miles, and there is no other way she could have come to harm. No. The more I think over it, the more I am convinced that Clavering

is at the bottom of it ; but he means to deny it, and has evidently taken such precautions that I doubt our being able to trace it to him."

"If I were only convinced that this is the case," I replied, "not a stone would I leave unturned till I had unmasked his villainy. Consider, Percy, how kind those poor people were to me, treated me more like a relative than a stranger thrust on them by a mere chance ; very likely I owe my life to their kindness, and no recompense would they receive. Surely, the least I can do is to act as a brother might by poor little Amy, it is not much I can do for her now, poor lost girl ; but think of her fate, left entirely in the power of such a wretch as he must be ; and whatever may happen to her she will dread to make her condition known to her friends. Poor little thing, she will die of a broken heart ! She must have been basely deceived in the first instance, I feel sure ; and she is not the girl to be happy in a life of wickedness."

"It is a bad business in every way, and I am sorry for the poor old farmer and his wife. You must go there to-morrow, Charley, and try what you can do to comfort them. I went out two or three times while you were away on leave, but I have not been very lately ; and then it was that I noticed two or three trifles that led me to my present idea about Clavering."

"What were they ?" I inquired.

"Trifles all, and most likely would not have struck me much, only for what has happened. On one occasion when I was riding out in that direction, I met him as I thought returning from the farm ; but chancing to remark that I supposed Major Clavering had been there before me, Mrs. Morland said he had

not been with them for some time, and hoped he was well. Quite accidentally, I glanced at Amy as she was saying this, and her face became crimson; I could not avoid noticing it, for I never saw any one blush so distressingly before; and I had made no remark that could cause it, as far as I recollected. Then it struck me she had perhaps been out walking at the time and had met him, and felt awkward about mentioning it; but really it was a very simple circumstance, and I can't say I did think very much of it. Then the only other time, I called I went out by the ~~main~~ walked over to the farm.

"Only Amy was in the house and she was sitting in the parlour to the window. I suppose she had been out on the gravel and looked round, but did not know it was; for she came and opened the door so disappointed when she saw it was I. She had such a beaming, happy expression when she opened the door; and her face fell at an evidently disappointed expectation. She came up at once and was quite herself. I noticed she imagined it was you back. I laughed and said, 'Ah! Amy. I thought it was somebody else that you received with that dismal face; but he has not returned. I will take me for a substitute in the meantime.'

"She laughed too, and began to tell me. *now* I am certain she had expected

"No doubt of it," I replied; and we went on with it, and we shall see if he will

"No, Charley, not yet. He did not come out, and has clearly taken such a dislike to me. He feels pretty secure against discovery

absent a day since it happened, so there is no proof against him at present, and you must try and obtain some before you speak ; for it is one thing to make an accusation, and another to have the means of supporting it. Wait a little before you say more to him than you have done ; and in the meantime let us try and find a trace of poor Amy, who I should scarcely think can be very far from the neighbourhood."

So we parted for the present.

Major Clavering dined out that day, so we did not meet at mess, and I cannot say that I was sorry for his absence.

My leave not being up for a day or two, I was still my own master ; so I ordered my horse the following morning after breakfast, and rode off to pay a painful but necessary visit to the farm.

It was a lovely spring day, almost to be called a summer one ; the birds were singing cheerily on every tree and bush ; the soft, fresh wind blew the sweet perfume of the hawthorn and early clover into my face ; my eyes drunk in the beauty of the charming time of year, every step that I advanced into the country, and left the smoke and brick-walls of A—— far behind me.

Few things in life are more thoroughly enjoyable than a ride on horseback on a bright spring morning ; the fair face of our English nature is then seen to its very greatest advantage. There is a freshness, a hopefulness about the season and the hour that no other time ever possesses in my eyes. Very lovely is the calm summer evening ; most exquisite the mild radiance of the silver moonlight ; the soft dreamy autumn afternoon with the low wind rustling through the richly-tinted woods, and a golden leaf every now

and then eddying noiselessly round and round and falling faintly on the turf at our feet, has a charm peculiar to itself; but each and all of those fair moments bear in their very beauty something sad and touching, even while we gaze we are forcibly reminded of the transient nature of their loveliness, we feel that they and we are of the earth earthly. But spring is the season of hope and promise; the delicately-tinted leaves have yet to assume the richer colouring of summer, the gently-budding blossoms have to progress into the glorious fulfilment of the bright and fragrant time of many-hued flowers; everything is then advancing, nothing standing still or "fading away."

Unless bowed down by a heavy weight of sorrow, it is difficult for the heart not to beat more lightly on a spring morning, when everything in nature, animate and inanimate, seems to rejoice in the glad sunshine, the scented breeze, and the blue sky with the masses of fleecy clouds floating lazily along, throwing their faint shadows on the slowly waving meadow-grass. Such a morning was it when I left A——, and rode past the familiar hedge-rows and coppices on my way to the old farm.

But as I neared this abode of sorrow, and thought how changed all was now in the once cheerful dwelling-place, my spirits fell as I contemplated the mournful scene awaiting me; and insensibly my pace became a walk when the well-known red gable appeared among the trees.

Alas! it was worse than even I had dreaded.

All silent was the accustomed welcome of the jovial old farmer—honest Rover's warning bark was the only notice taken of my arrival; and I dismounted and hung my horse's rein on the paling, as I advanced

with beating heart to tap lightly at the closed door. A flurried-looking dairy-girl came at my summons, her apron at her eyes, and her whole appearance denoting grief and bewilderment. A fresh misfortune had fallen on the little household. The loss of his beloved grandchild, and the shock and mystery connected with the whole affair, had proved too much for the worthy old farmer; and after his long and ineffectual search, he had returned to his home only to be seized with a violent fit of apoplexy, from which there was little or no hope of his recovery. Such proved too truly to be the case. Poor Mrs. Morland received me in the midst of all her distress, and seemed comforted by my assurance of sympathy and active assistance.

At my express desire, she took me into the room where the good old farmer lay dying.

Death was written on his countenance, I knew at once that there could be no hope; and I clasped the powerless hand of my kind old friend, and by his dying pillow I vowed a vow, that, Heaven helping me, I would be a friend to those he was leaving behind; and would do all in my power to redress the wrongs of the poor girl whose betrayal had caused all this weight of woe.

That night the worthy farmer died; never having been sensible since the beginning of his attack.

Percy Lascelles and I attended his funeral; and there were no more sincere mourners on the melancholy occasion.

His widow wished to leave a place now tenanted by so many painful recollections; and having advertised the farm for sale, she returned with a brother who had

come up for the funeral from his home in a distant county, and I never saw her again.

Thus ended my connexion with the old farm ; and many a sad hour I had in thinking over the happy days I had spent there, and their mournful conclusion. Lascelles and I tried everything we could think of, searched everywhere we could think of, and this we did for many a long day, but of the missing girl we could discover not the slightest trace ; and even sometimes the idea would cross my brain, " Have we wrongfully suspected Major Clavering after all ? " " No." The conviction of his guilt would come home clear and strong ; and I felt sure that some day or other it would be traced to him, and the particulars of that dark story be brought to light.

And so I patiently waited.

END OF VOL. I.







